TELOS

NUMBER 124 Summer 2002

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On Dealing with What is Passing Away
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Introduction

Inextricably embroiled with Enlightenment ideology, modernist thought has never been able to accommodate traditions, which it routinely dismisses as obstacles to progress — irrational residues to be trashed as soon as possible. Efforts to do away with traditions, however, have resulted in failure and frustration. When all was said and done, the French Revolution paved the way for Robespierre and Napoleon, the October Revolution resulted in Stalin and Brezhnev, and the New Left's main accomplishment turned out to be the training of an army of bureaucrats and second-rate academics. This should come as no surprise, since the Enlightenment, on closer examination, has turned out to be a secularization and reification of long-standing traditions, without which it collapses into nihilism and self-destruction: the dialectic of Enlightenment. Its rationalism cannot be a self-justifying rational choice, and can only be predicated on the same kind of ultimately arbitrary grounds (e.g., faith and revelation) that modernists routinely mock in their dismissals of traditionalists and anything premodern.

Despite its "progressive" claims, after the overthrow of the aristocracy the Enlightenment has tended to favor the *status quo*, while advancing New Class interests. Historically, genuine radicalism, in its call for a return to roots, has always been an appeal to traditions that have either been lost or forgotten, and therefore in need of revival and reconstitution. While breaking with the past, the "qualitatively" new remains connected with what it leaves behind, at least to the extent that it can come about only after the latter has exhausted its possibilities of gradual development. This is why one of the defining features of the Hegelian dialectic is its unbroken continuity in determining the unfolding of the Absolute. Even Marx's communism, as well as the overcoming of alienation, boil down to the retrieval of something lost, or the re-establishment of essential severed relations. In this sense, despite its Promethean pretenses and the considerable expansion of freedom it has brought about, modernity turns out to be a cultural pathology unable to generate any meaning, and ultimately to be parasitic on the very traditions it unrelentingly seeks to destroy.

Modernity has been under attack for several decades, not only by postmodernists, but also, as James Kalb argues in his survey of the present political landscape, by paleo-conservatives, and, as John Zerzan points out by listing some of the most debilitating results of modernization, by that part of the Left that has not

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been completely coopted by bureaucratic (New Class) ideology. The series of catastrophes that characterized the 20th century have terminally shaken the predominant progressive faith, and have led to a reconstitution of the cultural and political landscape. In denying all traditional foundations with its claim that "anything goes!" (thus remaining embroiled in modernist nihilism), postmodern criticism has unwittingly relegitimated all previously dismissed traditional frameworks (predicated on theological premises or their secularized equivalent) as equally viable and arbitrary ways of dealing with the world. As Aryeh Botwinick argues in his debunking of religious fundamentalist claims in general, and those of Islamic extremists in particular, traditions turn out to be the only remaining guide after it becomes clear that the *Akeidah* — access to any kind of divinity or its functional equivalent — is impossible. Even the most widely accepted revelations, such as those of Christianity and Islam, do not guarantee this access since, as Botwinick demonstrates, it remains for the individuals who experience them or otherwise accept them to determine whether or not these revelations are genuine. Thus, whatever presents itself as the divine inevitably devolves into the human, and its status and meaning become political issues. Given this state of affairs, these decisions can only be made within existing traditional frameworks, whose axiological primacy becomes thereby reasserted, while at the same time turning the interpretation of, and adherence to transcendental claims into free, concrete political choices. Bottom line: Allah, Jehovah or any other divinity cannot speak to mere humans, who ultimately must take responsibility for how they construe anything divine or transcendent. Thus, any *jihad* can only be self-serving propaganda for particularistic interests, with no transcendental import.

Traditions also play a role in David Gross' attempt to develop a typology to classify modern modes of dealing with the past or "what is passing away." Of the four models he proposes, the most viable one deals with the past and, *ipso facto*, tradition, by consciously internalizing it and retaining its memory as part of one's mental furniture. Convincing as it may sound, this last option turns out not to be all that modern, since it acknowledges a rootedness in history that not only determines identity, but also provides behavioral parameters and moral guidance.

Thes kind of personality that can relate to the past and to traditions along these lines is precisely what in his article on "Technology and Destiny" Karnoouh sees as being destroyed by technology, understood along Heideggerian lines, as the shock-troop of modernity. Particularly troublesome — and highly debilitating — is not only the bureaucratization and regimentation of everyday life, but genetic engineering and recent biological research tinkering with the very structure of the human make-up. Karnoouh, however, may have gone too far in projecting into the present the worst forebodings of Aldous Huxley's classic work, *Brave New World*. Thus, as part of a project to reconfigure social stratification on a worldwide scale, he foresees the genetic engineering of humanity into two classes, the rich and the poor, within a smoothly-run, totally administered

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society. While there is plenty to worry about when it comes to this kind of biological research, it is unlikely that "human nature" can be so easily manipulated.

Today, social stratification is established and maintained through the demographic dialectic between advanced and backward societies, whereby the economic disparities between the two translate into rather different birthrates, an international division of labor favoring post-industrial societies, and massive migrations. As a result, there is a growing brain-drain by advanced societies which, by promising and often acually providing upward mobility for immigrants — some of the best and the brightest in underdeveloped societies — separate people into two general categories: the most enterprising and well-educated chasing after better economic opportunities in post-industrial countries, and those left behind, mired in corrupted traditions and manipulated by unscrupulous local elites, who are relegated to low-profit, ecologically dangerous industrial production and the biological reproduction of labor-power. Some genetic engineering may very well result in Frankensteinian surprises, but they are not likely to have any serious impact on either national or international social stratification.

Karnoouh may also have gone too far in his "genealogy of globalization" in identifying this globalization with the end of difference and therefore of the possibility of any opposition to prevailing Western hegemony. Despite the fact that, as he points out, multiculturalism is the most sophisticated policy yet deployed to homogenize strikingly different populations worldwide, it is a miserable failure. Interacting cultures blend spontaneously and cannot be regulated by state mandates pretending to legitimate their particularity while homogenizing their practices in conformity with the predominant liberal ideology. Moreover, differences erased on one level tend to resurface somewhere else in different guises. Most important, opposition to the commodification of everyday life cannot come from places like Polynesia or similarly esoteric far-away lands, where local customs and traditional modes of consumption cannot possibly compete with the overwhelming lure of Western gadgets. Rather, it comes from within — first, as Karnoouh points out, as what Hegel called "abstract negation," to solve the various crises merely by extending and accelerating the logic of the given; but eventually as concrete alternatives. The Western tradition, like all traditions, is sufficiently porous and heterogeneous to allow for a variety of possible reconstitutions, including genuinely radical ones. After all, globalization obtains only at the economic level, by extending market relations everywhere. Since Washington's farewell address, traditional US foreign policy has generally been predicated on economic presence and political absence. As long as this condition is fulfilled, cultural and political arrangements can take any form: multinational capitalism could not care less about politics and culture. At any rate, economic determinism has never made any sense, and after the collapse of the Soviet empire is not even fashionable among New Class intellectuals any more.

Contrary to Enlightenment propaganda, traditions are not static, frozen in time,

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or unchangeable. Their evolution, however, is slow and often undetectable. Never unequivocally spelled out, traditions present themselves as incomplete clusters that can only be completed in the process of their re-enactment by those individuals and groups living by them. As such, they always presuppose considerable political space within which the past, in order to be at all useful and comprehensible, is constantly reconstituted, thereby also constituting in the process the identity of those engaged in such a project. In his discussion of Marx's and Stirner's ways of dealing with "the uncanny," Saul Newman recycles Freud's account as "the return of the repressed," in the attempt to locate the space within which political identity can be redefined. But Freud's questionable notion of "repression" — part and parcel of psychoanalytic soft-porn fairy tales, which nowdays may help explain Freud's own sexual repression — only confuses the concept of the uncanny, mystified as "the return of repressed specters of idealism" interpreted as "a gap in social representation." If one dismisses repression as the unwarranted universalization of a particular psycho-sexual quirk of the Viennese bourgeoisie, the "gap in social representation" turns out to have nothing to do with a "return of repressed specters of idealism," but rather with the attempt to describe the only possible way to confront the past and the legacy of tradition. So understood, the uncanny does turn out to be a condition essential for the constitution of political identity, as Newman concludes, but it is no longer predicated on the various simplistic and false depictions of "idealism" provided by Marx, Stirner, and Newman, or on the obsession of some of the more ideologically crude sectors of what remains of the Left, seeking to relegitimate the arbitrary political identity of the various groups forcibly aggregated within the old, long since discredited, "Rainbow Coalition."

Disentangled from fashionable poststructuralist mystifications, the uncanny may also help explain how certain traditions can occasionally reappear disguised as their exact opposite. Thus, as Daniel Pellerin demonstrates, the most iconoclastic figure of the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche, whose numerous attacks on Christianity are notorious for their ferocity and bluntness, on closer scrutiny turns out to recycle, in subtle ways, the very Christian values he otherwise indicts. The ambiguous and incomplete character of the uncanny, however, may also facilitate the corruption of traditions. Thus, historically, is has often been the case that the metaphors through which traditions are transmitted from generation to generation become absolutized and interpreted literally, with devastating consequences.

A traditional instance of this absolutization, Gnosticism, in its various manifestations, postulated direct access to the divinity through "illumination," and was officially condemned as a heresy early in the history of Christianity. More recently, Eric Voegelin and his followers have gone much further and held it responsible for modern forms of totalitarianism — at least to the extent that Gnosticism not only claims direct access to truth, but also, all too often, that everyone should be forced to recognize this truth and act accordingly. But Voegelin's account was never all that precise, and, as critics have often pointed out, is so

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broad that it ends up applying to just about anyone Voegelin did not like. Arthur Versluis re-examines Voegelin's analysis of Gnosticism and, taking the Inquisition as the paradigm of Catholic political behavior, accuses Voegelin's antignosticism of boiling down to an apology for a Catholicism that is actually guilty of all the crimes that Gnostics have historically been charged with. Faulty as Voegelin's account may have been, it is questionable that it can be reduced to Catholic apologetics, and that Catholicism can be identified, *tout court*, with the Inquisition. As Carl Schmitt pointed out, Catholicism has always been a *complexio oppositorum* seeking to accommodate all conflicting religious views within its universalist fold. To be sure, there have been all too many instances of excesses, from the Crusades to the burning of Savonarola and Giordano Bruno. Over all of its history, however, the Catholic Church's predominant *modus operandi* has privileged the autonomy of geographically scattered parishes, and the development of various particularistic cults integrating local pre-Christian customs and traditions constructed around the worship of specific saints. It is meaningless nowdays, in the age of multiculturalism and the marginalization of all of religion to particular idiosyncrasies (if not collective pathologies), to ascribe totalitarian objectives to institutions such as the Catholic Church, desperately attempting to avoid Chapter 11, not only concerning post-Vatican II reforms, but also, and more importantly, the resulting abuses by priests who practiced the irresponsibility and permissiveness fostered by the recent "sexual liberation" within the Church.

A kind of Gnosticism predicated on natural law and natural rights also permeates Luigi Marco Bassani's devastating critique of the Republican School's distortion of the source and character of Anglo-American political ideas. Correct as the critique may be, it stands on the clay feet of reifications such as natural rights and natural law, whose historicity and constituted character undermines their authority. If, like God, nature does not speak man's language and has to be approached through concepts, scientific or otherwise, that have to be constituted through the deployment of considerable creative efforts, then there is absolutely nothing natural about "natural law" and "natural rights." They cannot carry the epistemological weight that they are expected to in political theory, and, like the emperor's new clothes, cannot conceal the naked artificiality and arbitrariness typical of all particular cultural constructs. From this it does not follow that the kind of constitutional system the Founding Fathers managed to put together is any less of a masterpiece. It means that both liberal interpreters of the US Constitution and their "strict constructivist" opponents need to give up the pretense that documents have fixed meanings, which must be taken as they were originally meant or reinterpreted in light of changed socio-historical conditions. Like all conceptual constructs, they are inherently "uncanny" and, therefore, must be constantly renegotiated politically, even if they happen to enjoy the kind of immense support as does the US Constitution.

Paul Piccone

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Political Abuse of a Biblical Paradigm: The Case of the Akeidah[1]

Aryeh Botwinick

In response to the terrorist bombings of Sept. 11, Philip Wilcox, a former Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism in the State Department, offered the following advice: "We should . . . search for ways to strengthen the common bonds between Western values and Islam to combat the notion of a 'clash of civilizations' and to weaken the Islamist extremist fringe that hates the West and supports terrorist actions." "Redefining national security and counter-terrorism in this broader sense is the most promising way to fight the war against terrorism."[2] Implicit in Wilcox' formulation is the idea that perhaps exploring and exploiting the core monotheistic ideas shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims constitutes a promising avenue for discrediting and delegitimating the Muslim extremist fringe's mistaken understanding of Islam.

The Muslim terrorists' religiosity is based on texts, rather than on the traditional transmission of teaching between father and son, or teacher and pupil.[3] The drive animating Muslim extremists to achieve certainty and charismatic connection with a divine source is so strong that only literal textual certification of what needs to be done will suffice. Being a religious traditionalist who simply perpetuates the ways of his parents and teachers is inadequate, because tradition bears the ongoing traces of adaptation of

1. Parts of this article were written in 1998.

2. Philip C. Wilcox Jr., "The Terror," in *The New York Review of Books* (Sept. 19, 2001), p. 4.

3. On this dichotomy, see Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), and Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," in *Tradition*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (1994).

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textual requirements to the exigencies of everyday life in both local and more extended settings, and the tacit compromises and trade-offs that constitute the lifeblood of tradition are precisely what the Muslim extremists are rebelling against. They want to achieve a gnostic re-embeddedness in the pristine forcefulness and clarity of the word of the Prophet and of God.

The Muslim extremists' obsessive religious sensibility propels them to bypass the humanly and historically tainted route of traditionalism in favor of a "self-evident" textualism that redeems both Islam and themselves, and the historical moment which they concurrently occupy, of all of their dross. In this context, it is crucial to ferret out the original biblical text inspiring those Islamic texts that glorify violence and sacrifice for the sake of sealing an everlasting communion with God. In the case of violence and sacrifice, the biblical text inspiring Islamic as well as Christian Scriptures is the *Akeidah* (the attempted sacrifice of Abraham's son). Thus, it becomes an act of political consciousness to be able to read the *Akeidah* in an alternative and even diametrically opposed way, as illustrating the primacy of human life in the monotheistic religious worldview.

The Patriarch Abraham looms as a central figure in the religious imagination of Jews and Muslims, because he was the progenitor of both Isaac *and* Ishmael, who are regarded respectively as fathers of the Jewish and the Arab nations. The most jarring event in Abraham's career, as recounted in the Torah, is what Jews call the *Akeidah*: the binding. Abraham appears to be called upon by God to sacrifice his son. At the last possible moment, he pulls back, and the semblance of normal life is resumed by father and son. Muslim and Jewish traditions differ as to which son Abraham was bidden by God to sacrifice: Isaac or Ishmael. In order to gain insight into the theological location of Abraham, the question of which son he was asked to sacrifice is secondary, since one can assume a strong attachment to both sons. Either way, the divine testing of Abraham was of the highest order of magnitude.

The biblical narrative actually includes a separate account of a more oblique "sacrifice" of Ishmael, and Abraham's response to it prefigures his response at the *Akeidah*. After the birth of Isaac, Sarah tells Abraham to drive Ishmael and his mother Hagar away from their household, so that Abraham's cultural, religious, and material inheritance will devolve exclusively on Isaac and his progeny. The Bible reports that "the thing [Sarah's injunction] was very evil in the eyes of Abraham because of his son."[4] It is

4. Genesis 21:11.

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only after God issues a covenantal promise to Abraham that "also of the son of the maidservant [Hagar] will I make a nation, because he is thy seed,"[5] does Abraham reluctantly agree to send Hagar and Ishmael off into the desert with "bread and a skin-vessel of water." It is important to note in terms of conflicting claims of theological legitimacy that the Bible juxtaposes the covenantal promise concerning Ishmael's inheritance alongside the covenantal promise of Isaac's inheritance. The same Hebrew word seed (*zerah*) is used in Genesis 21:12-13 to describe the basis for the covenantal assurance regarding both inheritances.

From Maimonides' and Rashi's perspectives, the *Akeidah*, which seems to underwrite the sacrifice of self and others as the supreme value of monotheistic religion (and thus also serves as a key inspiration for the pivotal Christian theological category of the Crucifixion) is transformed into an affirmation of unbridgeable distance between man and God, and a consequent celebration of the value of individuality over the ecstasy of merging.

The Search for the Ultimate *Other Devolving into Reconfigured Modes of Ethical Relation with* Human *Others*

In his analysis of the *Akeidah*,[6] Maimonides prefigures Emmanuel Levinas' approach, whereby the search for the ultimate, supreme Other (i.e., God) devolves unto reconfigured modes of ethical relations with other people.[7] Accordingly, Rav Shneur Zalman of Ladi (the "Baal Hatanya" and founder of the Lubavitch Chassidic movement) says that the biblical injunction to love God monotheistically displaces unto the commandment to love one's fellowman as oneself.[8] It is as if the Torah provides an intratextual gloss on what it means that one should love God (which is recited as part of the "Shema") by paraphrasing the requirement to love one's fellowman. Since negative theology precludes conceptual negotiation of God, it provides a more conceptually available target, i.e., one's fellow men.

Reb Simcha Zissel of Kelm raises an issue of reflexivity regarding the

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5. *Ibid.*, verse 13.

6. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed,* tr. by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

7. The *locus classicus* for Levinas' treatment of ethics as "first philosophy" is *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, tr. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

8. Cited in Chaim Yaacov Zuckerman, *Sefer Otzar Chaim: Vayikrah* (Tel-Aviv, n.d.), p. 130. The verse concerning loving one's fellow men as oneself comes from Leviticus 19:18. See Leviticus 19:34, where the same injunction (following the same grammatical construction) is repeated in relation to the stranger.

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verses in Leviticus. If love is commanded (and one complies), then it can no longer be love. How can one reconcile the form of the statement (as a command) with its content (which is to exhibit something as utterly spontaneous and encompassing as love)? Reb Simach Zissel suggests that the resolution is to be found in the phrase "as oneself." Just as a person manifests self-love instinctively, without calculation, limit, or specific goal in mind, so is one bidden to display love to the other. The ideal projected by the Torah is thus of a love of the other that approximates as fully as possible the pre-conscious attachment that a human being has toward himself.[9]

A third gloss on this verse focuses on the fact that this pre-conscious attachment can never be fully expressed or embodied. The operative preposition in the verse in Leviticus is registered in Hebrew by a Lamed (L) rather than by an ETH. The Hebrew word for fellowman is preceded by an L rather than by an ETH. ETH suggests something finite and appropriable, whereas L conjures up something more transitional and prospective. The force of the preposition L, in contradistinction to the preposition ETH, is to underscore that one's relation to another must be predicated on an ongoing movement toward, rather than on the prospect of a complete appropriation.

A fourth gloss would account for the juxtaposition of "I am God" to the preceding phrase of "Love thy fellowman as thyself" by noting that what often thwarts the expression of love between people is an analysis of the motives, character, or personality of the other as unfit for love and affection. Also, a lot is often invested mentally and emotionally in calculations (e.g., is the other person doing enough for me to warrant what one is investing in him?) that undermine the imperative to love one's fellow men. To these anxieties, the verse responds by emphasizing: "I am God." The inner self is transparent only to God. The monotheistic God is postulated in such a way that human beings are transparent only to Him. From a sheerly human perspective, there is a premium placed on doing — on acting in accord with the maxim of "Love thy neighbor as thyself" — as harboring the largest prospect in a context of imperfect knowledge of transforming one's overall situation to bring about the largest prospect for good.

The phrasing in the 19th blessing of the *Amidah* (the central portion of the prayer service that Jews recite three times a day) communicates the same message about the primacy of other people within the value scheme of monotheistic religion. This blessing for *Shalom* (peace) includes the following language: "Bless us, our Father, all of us as one, with the light

9. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

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of Your countenance, for with the light of Your countenance You gave us, Hashem, our God, the Torah of life and [of] a love of kindness."[10] This passage chronicles a process of devolution from what is infinite and unfathomable to what is more finite and manageable. Each phrase serves to reduce the inscrutability and to provide a firmer grip on the phrase that precedes it. The light of God's countenance is not perceivable or negotiable. The distance is unbridgeable. So one is given a more intermediate level of relations upon which to gain a firmer foothold: "The Torah of life." But the Torah (referring to both the Written and the Oral Torah) is infinite — susceptible to infinite interpretations and reinterpretations, so that no one can ever glean or master it all. The prayer moves on to a third, more accessible level: "[of] a love of kindness." Interpersonal relations are the most finite and manageable of all. Despite the infinite character of the ethical imperatives that are addressed to man, and the infinite possibilities for applying and adapting them to human experience, one needs to interact with others in order to survive and to get on with the business of living. Interpersonal relations are unavoidable, and basic to the project of living. In this sense, it is the furthest one can go in translating the ideal of coming into contact with "divine countenance." What remains inscrutable on the divine level becomes actionable on the human level.

The official subject matter of the 19th blessing of the *Amidah* is peace, and the deep linkage encapsulated in this prayer is that the route to both inner and outer peace is by cultivating stamina and the skill to negotiate the previously mentioned transitions and devolutionary movements. According to the rabbis, "peace" is one of the names for God.[11] The obliqueness and minimalism implicitly advocated by the "19th blessing" in approaching God is corroborated by a famous passage in the Babylonian Talmud, in the tractate *Hagigah* 14b, which speaks of four scholars who entered *pardes* — realms of mystical contemplation identified with *Ma'aseh Merkabah* (literally, "The Work of the Chariot"; figuratively, divine science) and *Ma'aseh Bereshith* (literally, "The Work of the Beginning"; figuratively, cosmology, physics). According to the Talmud, only one, Rabbi Akiva, "entered in peace and went out in peace." Maimonides interprets this dictum as follows: "If, finally, you do not aspire to apprehend that which you are unable to apprehend — you will have achieved human perfection and attained the rank of Rabbi Akiva, peace be on him, who *entered in peace*

10. *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, ed. by Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1986), p. 117.

11. Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbath* 10b.

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and went out in peace when engaged in the theoretical study of these metaphysical matters."[12] Rabbi Akiva entered the *pardes* realm in pursuit of God, and returned with an enhanced sense of his own and mankind's rational limitations. Maimonides' interpretation here (as in the *Akeidah)* is evocative of what Rashi says in the Babylonian Talmudic tractate *Yevamot* 49b, about the superiority of Moses' prophecy over all others. The Talmud says that Moses saw *b'aspaklaria hameira* (through a clear glass), in contrast to the other prophets, who prophesied *b'aspaklaria she'anena meira* (through a dim glass). Here Rashi, who prides himself on the literal faithfulness of his interpretations of biblical and Talmudic texts, turns the literal meaning of this passage on its head. He says that *aspaklaria hameira* means *v'yadah shelo ra'ahu b'fanav*, i.e., that Moses knew that he did not see God face to face, unlike the other prophets who sometimes fell prey to the illusion that they did.

According to Maimonides' interpretation of the Talmudic text in *Hagigah* (for which the 19th blessing in the *Amidah* may now be claimed a precursor), Rabbi Akiva goes in pursuit of God and returns with a deeper awareness of human rational limitations, which spells the possibility of peace. The minimalist, operationalized definition of God achieved via the intermediacy of a confrontation with human limitations turns out to be peace. The reduced epistemological stakes connoted by such terms in the modern epistemological vocabulary as idealism, nominalism, and skepticism lay the groundwork for the achievement of political and personal peace.

The devolution of God unto peace is paralleled at the start of the petitionary section of the *Amidah* (where Jews beseech God for particular benefits) by the identification of knowledge, insight, and wisdom with grace or charm. The prayer reads: "You charmingly [or graciously] endow man with knowledge [or wisdom] and teach insight to a frail mortal. Endow us charmingly [graciously] from Yourself with knowledge [wisdom], insight, and discernment. Blessed are You, Hashem, the charming [gracious] Bestower of knowledge [wisdom]." This blessing sustains an equivalence throughout between "knowledge," "insight," and "charm." Apparently, for the author of this blessing, knowledge of things human partakes of the same unapproachability and inscrutability as knowledge of things divine. The connection might be even deeper. The prayer's author could have used the Hebrew word *noten*, which means to give: "You give man knowledge." Instead, he uses the word *chonen*,

12. Maimonides, *Guide*, *op. cit.*, Part I, Ch. 32, p. 68 (italics in original).

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which immediately evokes the word *chein*, which means charm. Since, from a negative theological perspective, the divine vocabulary is inescapably metaphoric, even *noten* could not have been construed literally, and validation of a divine source for one's knowledge claims would have to be ruled out. The substitution of *chonen* for *noten* suggests that one is being supplied with an epistemological commentary on one's knowledge statements and claims from a negative theological perspective. For the author of this prayer, human knowledge is a matter of charm — what makes sense and what one is able to convince other people of — rather than of certainty. It is grounded in *appeal*, rather than in solid, objective proof. The ground separating the true and the pleasing is much more tenuous than many in more sober and hard-headed moments would allow.

The subterranean connection linking this epistemological commentary and negative theology may be conceptualized as follows: nominalism constitutes a key background premise to negative theology. In order for negative theology (denial of attributes) to get off the ground, the idea of God must already have been subsumed under the category of a humanly fashioned "universal." Then, the negative theological approach falls into place: it shows that the idea of God as universal connotes an entity totally different from anything humanly fathomable, that in order to function as an ultimate explanatory factor, it cannot be answerable to any realist vocabulary. But if, from a realist perspective, the class of existents is not restricted to "individuals" or "groups of individuals," but extends to universals as well, the notion of God would then be assimilable to other universals and, no matter how divergent His properties might be from other universals, His existence could still be predicated. It is only because negative theology presupposes the truth of nominalism, i.e., that only individuals or groups of individuals exist, and therefore the ontological status of the concept of God is consigned to the unreal category of universal, that its utter and total distinctness as a universal begins to matter. But if universals were real, the concept's uniqueness would not matter. God's existence would be safeguarded by negative theology's realist metaphysics.

The special *Amidah* recited on Sabbath afternoon seems to encode a similar devolutionary process to that found in the weekday *Amidah*. The central portion of the prayer begins as follows: "You are One, and Your Name is One; and who is like Your people Israel, one nation on earth."[13] The phrasing here glides almost imperceptibly from God's Oneness to His

13. *The ArtScroll Siddur*, *op. cit.*, p. 5 17.

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Name's Oneness to the oneness of the people Israel. The sentence seems to posit at least a near-equivalence between these three descriptions. In terms of a negative theological construal of the nature of God, it can be interpreted to mean that there is no literal access to God, that His Name can only be deployed for rhetorical and heuristic purposes. But if the impenetrability of the divine essence leads to displacement of God-talk with talk revolving about the Name of God, then the emphasis gradually shifts away from any constraints introduced by the nature of the entity that the name names to a pattern of consensual acknowledgements and collective allegiances to the significations of what the name officially names. Thus, the swift shift in focus in this prayer from God to Name to people registers the radical epistemological dislocation occasioned by monotheism.

The radical and ostensibly bizarre use to which the Talmud puts this statement reinforces this reading of the prayer. The Talmud says: "R. Abin son of R. Ada in the name of R. Isaac says: How do you know that the Holy One, blessed be He, puts on *tefilin* [phylacteries]? For it is said: The Lord hath sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength. . . . 'And by the arm of his strength': this is the *tefilin*; as it is said: The Lord will give strength unto His people. . . . R. Nahman b. Isaac said to R. Hiyya b. Abin: What is written in the *tefilin* of the Lord of the Universe? — He replied to him: And who is like Thy people Israel, a nation one in the earth. Does, then, the Holy One, blessed be He, sing the praises of Israel? — Yes, for it is written: Thou hast avouched the Lord this day . . . and the Lord hath avouched thee this day. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: You have made me a unique entity in the world, and I shall make you a unique entity in the world. 'You have made me a unique entity in the world,' as it is said: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 'And I shall make you a unique entity in the world,' as it is said: And who is like Thy people Israel, a nation one in the earth."[14] This passage, and another one found just two pages later in the same Talmudic tractate, raises the question, "How does one know that the Holy One, blessed be He, prays?" Here negative theological sensibility travels full circle. The inapplicability of a literal description of God's attributes, which spurs the devolution of the litany of divine epithets upon more manageable and accessible human contexts, sets the stage in turn for a projection of some of these attributes back to God now as openly-conceded metaphors. The forward movement of these attributes from God to man leads to a reluctant acknowledgment of their

14. See *The Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Berakoth*, tr. by Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1984), 6a.

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status as metaphors, which then leads to a backward movement of these attributes again projected to God, but this time openly celebrated as metaphors constituting a humanly mapped world of divine-human relations.

There is further confirmation of the irrevocability of distance in monotheistic religion in the literary structure of the *Kedushah* that is recited responsively by Jewish congregations in the repetition of the *Amidah* in the morning and afternoon prayers on weekdays and on the Sabbath and Holidays. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik has pointed to significant shifts in the grammatical phrasing of the *Kedushah*,[15] which begins by addressing God in the second person: "We shall sanctify Your Name in this world, just as they sanctify it in heaven above, as it is written by Your prophet, 'And one [angel] will call another and say'." The familiar second-person addressing of God now abruptly shifts to a third-person description: "Holy, holy, holy is Hashem, the Master of Legions, the whole world is filled with His glory." The third verse of the *Kedushah* underscores and magnifies the distance between the praying community and the object of the prayers — the monotheistic God — even further: "Blessed is the glory of Hashem from His place."[16] This verse insinuates the uniqueness and unshareable character of God's place. As the Rabbis, picking up on the echoes of this statement by the Prophet Ezekiel, formulate it: "God is the place of the world, and the world is not His place."[17] Thus, the phrase "His place" suggests that it is not man's place, and that one can inhabit it only provisionally and imaginatively as a metaphoric projection. The recitation of the *Kedushah* thus registers a paradox: The very process of attempting to draw near to the monotheistic God prolongs and extends *ad infinitum* the distance separating one from Him. This paradox is duplicated in Maimonides' description of the intellectual odyssey traveled by the patriarch Abraham.

Maimonides' Reading of the Akeidah

Maimonides writes that the command to slay Isaac comes to Abraham "in a dream and in a vision," which "in the opinion of the prophet" (i.e., Abraham) is "a vision of prophecy."[18] Abraham has to take ultimate responsibility for classifying his experience as a prophetic vision and for his

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15. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "U'Bikashtem Misham," in Soloveitchik, *Ish ha-Halakhah: Galuy ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 178-79.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
17. *Pesikta Rabbati*, Vol. 1, tr. by William G. Braude (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), Piska 21, p. 431.
18. Maimonides, *Guide*, *op. cit.*, Part III, Ch. 24, pp. 500-502.

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interpretation of it. Apparently, from Maimonides' negative theological perspective, which argues that one can only de-literalize the attributes applied to God without being able to come up with a sustainable set of positive identifications, one (even the most exceptional person with prophetic capacities) cannot claim that the message being received comes directly from God. God cannot speak in a humanly intelligible sense even to his prophets. Before there can be consent by the prophet's audience to receive his teaching as a prophetic message, there has to be the prophet's own consent to regard his vision as prophetic — consent both to the event of prophecy (that what is occurring is the communication of a prophetic message, rather than, say, a hallucination) and consent to the content of the specific prophecy. Since, in accordance with Maimonides' negative theology, God does not speak the way human beings speak, it is only the receiver's willingness (and of those whom he can persuade) to invest it with divine authority that gives it such authority. The gap between divine address and human response cannot be closed any less ambiguously.

With this premise in place, the second great lesson Maimonides derives from the *Akeidah* can be better appreciated. He formulates it as follows: one is "being informed with the limit of the *love* for God, may He be exalted, and *fear* of Him — that is, up to what limit they must reach."[19] Maimonides states this teaching first, and the teaching concerning the nature of prophecy second. When considered sequentially, the teaching concerning the extent to which one needs to exhibit the love and fear of God coming first, Maimonides' elucidation of the *Akeidah* seems to conform to the Muslim interpretation[20] as requiring one to set aside all forms of competitive love, such as for one's family, for the sake of focusing exclusively on the love of God. Yet, the second inference that he draws from the *Akeidah* relating to the centrality of the prophet in interpreting and taking responsibility for his prophetic message necessitates a reconfiguration of the impact of the first teaching.

Monotheistic teaching generally confronts the believer with a stark contrast between two routes to follow in actualizing its content. On the one hand, given the augustness and incomparability of God, it can be

19. *Ibid.*, p. 500 (italics in original).

20. Shaikh Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jilani, *The Sublime Revelation: A Collection* of *Sixty-Two Discourses*, tr. by Muhtar Holland (Houston: Al-Baz Publishing, 1992), Forty-Sixth Discourse, p. 294. Cf. Shaikh Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jilani, *The Removal of Cares: A Collection of Forty-Five Discourses*, tr. by Muhtar Holland (Ft.Lauderdale: Al-Baz Publishing, 1997), Forty-First Discourse, p. 242, n. 303.

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viewed as requiring its adherents to de-cathect from all human attachments for the sake of a total immersion in contemplation of and communion with God. On the other hand, given God's unbridgeable transcendence, relation with God can by default only proceed through the organization of the human spheres. To state more succinctly Abraham's dilemma in the *Akeidah*: What is the role of human others in relation to the primal Other connoted by God? Does God nudge all others aside from Himself out of place or is it mainly in relation to other people that traces of the Supreme Other (in some never-fully-redeemed metaphoric sense) can be experienced? Maimonides' emphasis on "the opinion of the prophet" in the second half of his analysis suggests that the *Akeidah* is a drama concerning the limits of the prophetic vision and vocation, given that "the opinion of the prophet" cannot be avoided. By cradling himself in the vision of divine embrace, can the prophet rely on some final burst of deliverance, or are the limits affecting his vocation as prophet indicated by the necessity of his "opinion" concerning the nature of the occasion and the message received symptomatic of broader limits in the content of those messages mandating accommodation of others before there can be any negotiation of the Other? From Maimonides' perspective, the *Akeidah* registers Abraham's wrestling with the limits of the monotheistic prophetic vision, and records Abraham's resistance to the allurements of divine deliverance in favor of a broader domain of freedom and responsibility, itself divinely grounded in negative theology.

Mainstream rabbinic thought is in full consonance with this reading of the *Akeidah*. For example, there is an anonymous view expressed in the Talmud (which is accepted as binding by later codifiers of Jewish law) that one is not allowed to injure oneself. The Talmud seeks to trace the author of this law, and finally aligns it with the following striking formulation: "Rebbi Eleazar Hakkapar Berabbi said: What is the point of the words: 'And make an atonement for him, for that he sinned regarding the soul.' Regarding what soul did this [Nazarite] sin unless by having deprived himself of wine? Now can we not base on this an argument *a fortiori:* If a Nazarite who deprived himself only of wine is already called a sinner, how much the more so one who deprives oneself of all matters."[21] The Jerusalem Talmud states that if one was too stingy to purchase and to taste all the new fruits that come out during a particular season, he will have to account for his omissions on the Day

21. *The Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Baba Kama*, tr. by E. W. Kirzner (London: Soncino Press, 1964), 91b.

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of Judgment.[22] Both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud reject asceticism and embrace an ethics of self-preservation and self-care. To some extent, one can see this as flowing out of the negative theological denial of a literal transcendental connection. Without such a connection, one has to rely on the immanentist norms of a well-lived life, which includes caring for one's body and achieving the temporary repose afforded by a moderate drinking of wine, and in general partaking of the good things in life. The Rabbis envisage the nurturance of a well-lived life as providing the best setting for study, prayer, and performance of the other commandments that merely keep one traveling endlessly on a path from which the highest consummatory moments have been theologically neutralized.

***Maimonides' Portrayal of Abraham in his* Code**

Maimonides' account of Abraham in his *Code*[23] evokes Abraham's dilemma, which is consistent with Maimonides' interpretation of the *Akeidah* in the *Guide.* In his account of Abraham's intellectual adventure, what motivates Abraham's formulation of the monotheistic principle (God's absolute otherness) is a desire to bring the philosophical/ scientific quest to a halt. As long as what the *explanans* (the statement doing the explaining) makes reference to is in any way continuous with the material to which the *explanandum* (the statement that needs to be explained) refers, the pursuit of reasons and causes can proceed indefinitely in the search for a primary explanation. The only way the quest can be brought to a satisfactory arrest is by postulating an *explanans* consisting of an entity totally unassimilable to human conceptual schemata. For Maimonides' Abraham, the origin of the monotheistic God depicted as wholly other arises from the need to achieve release from philosophical anxiety by postulating an entity as first cause that embodies absolute difference.

Here, however, the monotheistic believer who conceives of his belief in these terms has to pay a price. By postulating God as so totally distant, the believer has latched onto an entity that can be conceptualized as God. Yet, by being so distant and untranslatable into human terms, He ceases to explain at all. The quest for an ultimate explanatory factor is resolved

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22. Jerusalem Talmud, *Kiddushin,* Fourth Chapter; cited in Yechiel Michel Epstein, *Aruch HaShulchan: Orach Chaim* (New York: Jonathan Publishing Company, 1961), Vol. I, Ch. 225, §1.

23. Moses Maimonides, *Code*, Vol. 1, *The Book* of *Knowledge,* tr. by Moses Hyamson (New York: Feldheim, 1974); "Laws Concerning Idolatry and the Ordinances of the Heathens," Ch. 1, §2-3; Ch. 2, §1; 66b-67a.

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not by coming up with a solution, but by delegitimating the quest and making a mockery of itself.

A deepened appreciation of the problematic to which Abraham's position has thrust him offers a ray of hope for salvaging God, but only negatively as a possibility, not positively as an actuality. In Maimonides' formulation, Abraham's critique of the popular concept of God, which ascribes attributes to Him and therefore propels the explanatory quest ever forward, cannot be formulated consistently. Although Maimonides says that none of the traditional theological terms apply literally to God — He does not see, hear, or even exist in the way traditional religious understanding projects — he nonetheless wants all of his negative criticisms to apply to *God*: the subject of all of his negative, paring-down work is the traditional (mono)theistic God. In order for Maimonides' critical apparatus to have a viable target, he needs to maintain, somehow, whatever it is that his apparatus shoots down.

Maimonides' concept of God is thus contradictory. God can be apprehended only by denying Him in any humanly comprehensible way. Ironically, it is Maimonides' embrace of contradiction that gives him the only possible access to God.[24] Karl Popper has argued that, according to the rules of inference of traditional Aristotelian logic, a toleration of contradiction in the premises means that no possibilities can be ruled out in the inferences and conclusions. Thus, a generalized agnosticism (which leaves the door open to all possibilities) becomes one of the major outcomes of the acceptance of contradiction.[25] The impossibility of ruling out anything in the aftermath of contradiction creates ontological space for God.

A famous Talmudic statement concerning Abraham resonates well with this reading of monotheistic religion as predicated on a generalized agnosticism. "Our Rabbis taught: What was the coin of Abraham our Patriarch? An old man and an old woman on the one side; and a young man and a young woman on the other."[26] This passage has literal, historical import (since here is where the Talmud discusses redemption of second

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24. For a discussion of the role of contradiction in Maimonides' argument in the *Guide*, see Aryeh Botwinick, *Skepticism, Belief and the Modern: Maimonides to Nietzsche* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 13-15.

25. As Popper succinctly states: "If two contradictory statements are admitted, any statement whatever must be admitted; for from a couple of contradictory statements any statement whatever can be validly inferred." See Karl R. Popper, "What is Dialectic?" in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 317.

26. *Tractate Baba Kama*, *op. cit.*, 97b.

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tithe by means of coins and the repayment of a loan with a certain coin), but it also invites an allegorical reading. From a rabbinic perspective, there is obviously something about the joining of the figures of an old man and an old woman and a young man and a young woman that epitomizes Abraham's character. A transition to a symbolic reading is reinforced by what the *Tosafot* say about the coin:[27] there were no images on this coin, since Jewish law prohibits the etching of human images, but only that the *words* "old man" and "old woman" and "young man" and "young woman" were inscribed on it. The *Tosafot* cite Rashi as endorsing this reading. The dismissal of an imagistic construal of this coin implies a rejection of literal representationalism and emphasizes the coin's symbolic content as primary. In a subtle way, the *Tosafot* also provide clues as to what symbolic reading would make the most sense.

Thus, Abraham is identified in Jewish religious consciousness as the discoverer and primary spokesman for the monotheistic principle which displaces literal encounter with God with an endless string of verbal formulations that never transcend the level of the metaphoric. The inscription on the coin, which denies representationalism and paves the way for potentially endless paraphrases, mimics the denial of the literal confrontation with God and its devolution to a potentially infinite string of verbal paraphrases of the encounter. The surplus of meaning over text conjured up by the principle that Abraham discovers, and the verbal structure of the coin commemorating him are suggestive of a pervasive and deep-seated skepticism, which is sustainable only as a generalized agnosticism making available to people, at best, only a horizontal form of transcendence. A generalized agnosticism makes one hostage to a continually evolving present that corrects and completes its predecessors, but only imperfectly, since it is also hostage to subsequent presents. Therefore, from a monotheistic-skeptical perspective, all human presents (those inhabited by the young as well as by the old) are ontologically interchangeable (in the loose, but vibrant idiom, "two sides of the same coin"), since none of them yields a finished content. They open up to a future that confirms and perpetuates the uncertain ontological status of earlier moments in human historical development. This suggests that Maimonides' portrait of Abraham in the *Code* is consistent with that in the *Guide*, where he must decide whether he has been the recipient of a prophetic message, and what is its content.

27. The *Tosafot* is a classical collective medieval commentary on the Talmud, printed in standard editions of the *Babylonian Talmud*. The *Tosafot* begin on page 97b with the words: "The Coin of Abraham."

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The Biblical Context for Maimonides' Reading of the Akeidah

More relevant to an understanding of the *Akeidah* is Abraham's *Din Torah* with the *Ribono shel Olam* — his summoning God to account — concerning the fate of the people of Sodom. God notifies Abraham of his intention to destroy the city of Sodom, and Abraham immediately becomes their advocate in arguing that perhaps there is enough of a "saving remnant" to justify preserving the city. He goes down to as low a figure as "ten righteous people" and then withdraws. Staking out the claims of human justice, he says: "It is unworthy of thee to do after this manner to put to death the righteous with the wicked, so that like as the righteous so the wicked; it is unworthy of thee: Shall the Judge of the earth not do judgment?"[28]

Prefiguring the *Akeidah,* Abraham's confrontation with God over the destruction of Sodom leads to his clarifying human standards of justice for himself and God. The literal text of the Torah leaves it appropriately ambiguous whether God takes Abraham's strictures into account and then proceeds to destroy Sodom, because the city fails to meet Abraham's standards, i.e., there are not even ten righteous men in the city, or perhaps, God destroys it for reasons that remain inscrutably His own (the absence of ten righteous men has nothing to do with it), and the point of the encounter is just to give Abraham an opportunity to enunciate humanly defensible canons of justice. The logic of negative theology exemplified in the stories of the expulsion from Eden, Amalek, and the Tower of Babel[29] is suggestive of the latter reading.

The language used to narrate both the confrontation over Sodom and the *Akeidah* lends further support to this reading. The Torah ends its account of the colloquy over Sodom by saying "Abraham returned unto his place."[30] Analogously, the Torah concludes the story of the *Akeidah* by reinvoking and reaffirming human place: "So Abraham returned unto his lads, and they rose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham abode at Beer-sheba."[31] The reference to "place" in both cases is meant to have metaphysical as well as literal resonance, with the latter feeding into and reinforcing the former. The encounters with the divine concerning justice for Sodom and the sacrifice of his son confirm for Abraham the inviolability of human limits metaphorically captured by the notion of "place"

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28. Genesis 18:25.
29. See Aryeh Botwinick, "Does the Bible Legitimate Israeli Settlements?" in *Telos* 123 (Spring 2002), pp. 149-166.
30. Genesis 18:33.
31. Genesis 22:19.

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— a bounded and familiar location that is emotionally and symbolically linked with stability and security. In the *Akeidah* and in the confrontation with God about Sodom, Abraham's sense of individuality, freedom, and responsibility are enlarged through his recognition of how the concept of the endlessly receding monotheistic God serves as a perpetual invitation to people to make and remake themselves and their world in ceaselessly fruitful interaction with each other — to reclaim man's "place."

Rashi's Reading of the Akeidah

Maimonides' reading of the *Akeidah* is corroborated by Rashi's interpretation of key phrases in the biblical narrative, generally following precursor texts found in *Midrash Rabbah* on Genesis. In Genesis 22:2, it says: "And He said, take now thy son, thine only one, whom thou lovest, Isaac, and go into the land of Moriah; and bring him up there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I shall tell thee of." Rashi glosses the phrase "And bring him up" as follows: "He did not say 'Slay him,' because the Holy One, blessed be He, did not desire that he should slay him, but He told him to bring him up to the mountain to prepare him as a burnt offering. So when he had taken him up, God said to him, 'Bring him down'."[32] The fifth verse in the same chapter reads, "And Abraham said unto his lads, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder [In Hebrew: *nailcha ad koh*] and prostrate ourselves, and return [In Hebrew: *v'nashuvah*] to you." Rashi comments: "The Midrashic explanation (based upon the meaning of *koh*) is: I will see where will be (i.e., what will happen to) the promise which God made to me [in Genesis 15:5, 'Thus [*koh*] will thy seed be [as numerous as the stars *in* the *sky*]'." On the word, *v'nashuvah* (stated in the plural), Rashi says: "He prophesied that they would both return."[33] On the phrase in verse 12, which says "For now I know [after Abraham stretched forth his hand to slaughter his son] that thou fearest God," Rashi quotes from Genesis Rabbah: "R. Abba said: Abraham said to God, 'I will lay my complaint before you. Yesterday (on an earlier occasion) you told me, (21:12) 'In Isaac shall seed be called to thee,' and then again you said, (22:2) 'Take now thy son.' Now you tell me, 'Lay not thy hand upon the lad'! The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, 'My covenant will I not profane, nor alter that which is gone out of My lips.' When I told you, 'Take thy son,' I was not altering that which went out of My lips

32. *Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Genesis*, tr. by M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann (Jerusalem, 1972), p. 93.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

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namely My promise that you would have descendants through Isaac. I did not tell you 'Slay him' but bring him up to the mountain. You have brought him up — take him down again."[34]

On the verse which follows, where the Torah describes Abraham's substitution of a ram for his son Isaac, Rashi dwells on a redundancy in the text. The verse declares that Abraham brought up the ram "for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." Rashi immediately raises the question that from the context it is apparent that the ram is instead of his son. What is the force of the Torah's explicit highlighting of that fact? Rashi answers: "At every sacrificial act he performed on it he prayed saying, 'May it be Thy will that this act may be regarded as having been done to my son — as though my son is being slain; as though his blood is being sprinkled; as though his skin were being flayed; as though he is being burnt and is being reduced to ashes'."[35] Here, Rashi reconstructs (with Abraham as the mouthpiece) a kind of "transcendental deduction" of the religious category of "animal sacrifice" as the negative-theological surrogates for the more extreme, but in the end religiously repulsive act of self-sacrifice. To display his devotion and commitment to God, the believer would like to sacrifice himself. Doing so, however, would detract from God's mastery over the universe and all that thrives within it. It would be wresting control over oneself from God by expressing a colossal impatience with a God who "defines himself" in terms of unbridgeable distance. In the end, the metaphoric redescription of the attributes that one ascribes to God also transform the attributes associated with human modes of relating to Him into metaphors. Since the attributes assigned to God have no original in terms of which they can be compared and assessed, they continue to ricochet until they have infused everything aspiring to a relation with Him (including especially human beings) with their metaphorical character. It is not only God, but his counterplayers in the human sphere, who must endlessly resort to substitutes.

In Rashi's reading, the biblical text of the *Akeidah* pulsates with oscillation and double vision, as if Isaac's sacrifice is being called into question from the very outset. This is emphasized once again in the coda that follows the narrative, which revolves around the genealogy leading to the birth of Rebecca — Isaac's prospective wife. The Torah begins by saying, "And it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother

34. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

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Nahor."[36] Rashi addresses the tacitly-raised question by saying: "When he returned from Mount Moriah [where the binding of Isaac took place] Abraham was pondering and he said, 'If my son had really been slain, he would have died without children! I should have married him to one of the daughters of Aner or Eshcol or Mamre [who lived in Abraham's immediate environs].' The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore had the announcement made to him that Rebecca the one fit to be his [Isaac's] consort had been born. This is what is meant by 'after these things or words' — namely 'after the words' that expressed the thoughts aroused by the binding of Isaac"[37] The coda to the *Akeidah* again affirms the negative theological distance by exposing the unbridgeable gap between Abraham's calculations and God's concerning Isaac's marriage partner. On a deeper level, Rashi's reading highlights how Abraham's categories for making sense of Isaac's marital prospects invert the "divine categories" that are disclosed only tentatively and ambiguously (depending on one's seizing the initiative), and then only retrospectively. It turns out that what looked like the great stumbling block to Isaac's marriage, i.e., the *Akeidah*, was actually the great facilitator. As the only son of an elderly couple who had spent their whole married life praying for his arrival, from a psychological standpoint Isaac is obviously a very poor candidate for marriage. He is so overwhelmed by being the object of his parents' love that it undermines his ability to become a full-fledged subject capable of loving in his own right. The *Akeidah* subtly transforms all that. Instead of its being the most life-threatening event in Isaac's life, it becomes his most life-enhancing experience. Abraham's ability to individuate himself from God in the great trial of the *Akeidah* gives Isaac the strength (serves as his unconscious model) for individuating himself from his parents and becoming ready for marriage. The coda subtly suggests how the *Akeidah* becomes Isaac's great moment of triumph.

Rebecca's genealogy serves as an ironic counterpoint to the *Akeidah.* The sacrifice, commitment, and devotion that God was demanding of Abraham in a literal reading of the *Akeidah* get reinscribed in the biblical text (in immediate juxtaposition to the *Akeidah)* in a much more homely context: in the predispositions, attitudes, and actions required to move from a decision to get married to the selection of a mate to sustaining an enduring relation with the partner of one's choice. It is not just the content

36. Genesis 22:20.

37. *Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary: Genesis*, *op. cit.*, p. 97 (with one emendation by the author).

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of these virtues that gets implicitly called into question by the Bible's juxtaposition of the story of Rebecca's birth to the story of Abraham's purported sacrifice. It is also the context wherein they may be appropriately exercised, and the tenuous relation between means and ends that subsists within that context. The Torah collapses the story of the exercise of the virtue of sacrifice from an otherworldly to a this-worldly context by way of highlighting how excruciatingly means-dependent man's pursuit of particular ends is and of how an attempt to purge him of that dependence leads to a diminution, rather than an exaltation, of humanity.

The two events that follow the *Akeidah* in the Bible — the death of Sarah, and Eliezer's journey to secure a wife for Isaac — recapitulate the thematics of the *Akeidah.* In each case, there is a devolution of glorious ends unto prosaic and not-so-glorious means. Sarah's death is the occasion for the enactment of one of the noblest deeds within the value system of Jewish law: a *Chesed shel Emet* (literally, an act-of-kindness of truth). Since the dead cannot repay the respect and homage shown them by providing them with a proper burial, from a Jewish perspective burying the dead is regarded as the truest (least self-serving) expression of kindness. This idealized understanding of the act of burying the dead is immediately deconstructed in the biblical narrative into a recounting of the delicate maneuvers and negotiations that had to take place between Abraham and the Hittites in general, and Ephron the Hittite in particular (who owned the specific cave in which Abraham wanted to bury Sarah), before the religious ideal of a *Chesed shel Emet* could be realized in the common world of people and things (people absorbed by things). Again, the Bible disrupts the lurch toward the ideal by privileging a world of ceaseless transmutations of goodness into evil and of evil into goodness.

Eliezer (Abraham's chief-of-staff) journeys to Abraham's homeland of Aram Naharaim in order to secure a wife for Isaac. The whole future of the Jewish nation depends on the success of his mission. Isaac must have progeny that will then mushroom into tribes and finally develop into the unified Jewish nation. This ideal prospect is plotted in the biblical account by a long narrative concerning Eliezer's stratagems and machinations to get Isaac married. He devises a number of tests of character that Isaac's prospective bride must meet to prove her suitability. He also has to map alternative approaches to his goal in case his original plan of selecting a wife for Isaac from Abraham's family fails. Most importantly, he needs to be extremely shrewd and cagey in avoiding the various traps laid out for him by Rebecca's vicious father and brother, Besuel and Laban, that

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threaten his physical survival, his safeguarding of Abraham's wealth, and his overarching goal of finding a wife for Isaac. The Bible subtly captures Eliezer's delicate balancing act, continually disentangling his goal and its possibility of realization from the myriad of complicating circumstances that not only threaten the goal but, more importantly, his perception of it as distinguishable from the attendant adverse circumstances.

What emerges from this analysis is that Maimonides and Rashi turn the conventional understanding of the test confronting Abraham in the *Akeidah* on its head. The ordinary understanding (including the conventional Jewish understanding as enshrined in the prayer following the recitation of the *Akeidah* in the daily prayer service and as expressed in the liturgy of the High Holidays [Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur]) is to see the *Akeidah* as testing Abraham's resolve, commitment, and devotion to God, i.e., whether he is willing to sacrifice his favorite son on the basis of an inexplicable and what appears to be a highly disappointing and destructive divine command. Maimonides and Rashi (following the ancient Rabbis in *Midrash Rabbah*) subtly and obliquely subvert this reading. For them, the test appears to be whether Abraham will take the divine command at face value and sacrifice his son, or whether he will mobilize the freedom and exercise the responsibility vouchsafed to him by monotheistic theological principles to critically assess whether the sacrifice of his son constitutes the divine command. The *Akeidah* situates Abraham at the limit, or what Paul Tillich would call "on the boundary."[38] He is confronting the Terrible God whose visage and intentional calculus, cannot, as a matter of monotheistic theological definition, be pierced. If the Word of God were translatable straightforwardly, then He would not be the God that monotheistic theological principles stipulate. The prefix "mono" in the word monotheism emphasizes singularity and uniqueness, and thereby prevents any comparison between the attributes ascribed to God and how those attributes figure in ordinary human contexts. Speech is an attribute. It is obvious what it means for human beings to speak, but there is no formula for decoding the metaphor "God speaks."

Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who seems to be such an uncompromising advocate of negative theology, has a very different reading of the *Akeidah* from the one proposed here. He not only claims that his reading is compatible with negative theology, but that it represents its quintessential embodiment: "The trial of the Aqedah [*Akeidah*] conveys to us the essence of

38. Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary* (New York: Scribner, 1966).

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faith as man's ability to dissociate the consciousness of his standing before God from the problems of the individual, humanity, and the world. That is why Abraham is said to 'fear God,' not because of his stand in the debate on justice [concerning Sodom], to which all those who wish to empty the Torah of its religious meaning and to reduce it to 'moral' principles love to allude."[39] From this perspective, the *Akeidah* constitutes the enduring symbol of negative theological faith. The "consciousness of standing before God" divorced from all ethical implications evokes the image of the negative theological man of faith, for whom the religious stance in its defiant incomprehensibility stands aloof from rational and moral considerations. According to Leibowitz, the God who demands of Abraham that he sacrifice his son Isaac is the negative theological God *par excellence.* The problem with this approach is that in his conceptualization of the event he knows more than negative theology entitles him to know. He knows that monotheistic divinity has nothing to do with ethics. However, the rational argument seeking to bring the search for reasons and causes to a satisfactory arrest in the postulation of the existence of the absolutely unique and singular God eventuates in incoherence and contradiction. God as the Absolute Other can bring the explanatory quest to a halt. His Absolute Otherness debars Him from explaining anything in a humanly intelligible and comprehensible way. Explanatory finality is only achieved at the price of explanatory unintelligibility. The incoherence of the search for an ultimate foundation suggests that human judgments have a provisional character and remain skeptically vulnerable, and revisable. Skepticism, however, does not become the new candidate for the slot of ultimacy. In order for skepticism to be sustainable, it needs to include a skepticism of itself in the formulation of its own tenets, i.e., it needs to be stated in the form of a generalized agnosticism. The metaphysical correlative to negative theology is a generalized agnosticism — not a generalized atheism.

Thus, Leibowitz exceeds the warrant of negative theology in projecting the God of the *Akeidah* as symbolizing the "dissociated consciousness" of the negative theological believer. In order to remain coherent, the negative theological believer needs to question his questioning of God, and not to rest content with his questioning of the literal import of the notion of God. He cannot even for a moment suspend his questioning, including his questioning of his questioning. This means that his freedom is complete in interpreting the will and nature of God. God as Pure Will or

39. Yeshayabu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, ed. by Eliezer Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 119.

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Pure Command is just one phase in the dialectical unfolding of the nature of God. Investing in this projection is as methodologically unsound as investing in and affirming the realist image of God as the embodiment of the highest ethical and moral postulates. In Leibowitz' insufficiently deep version of negative theology, the theological realist and the theological skeptic are guilty of the same logical error.

If one pays close attention to the Torah's description of the life of Abraham, one will notice a stress on the performance of *mitzvot* as occupying the highest wrung of value from the Bible's perspective — even above reception of Divine Revelation — articulated right at the beginning of Parshat Vayeirah (the section of the Torah wherein the story of the *Akeidah* is found. After Abraham performs his first official commandment of circumcising himself and the male members of his household,[40] God appears to him in the oaks of Mamre as he sits at "the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day."[41] The way the Rabbis construe this verse following one of the Thirteen Exegetical Principles of Rabbi Yishmael (in this case applied to Aggadah, homiletics [non-legal materials] rather than to Halakhah [legal materials]) of "Davar Halamed M'Inyano" [a matter determined from its context] is that Abraham was sitting in front of his tent in search of passers-by to invite into his home by way of fulfillment of the mitzvah of Hachnasat Orchim [offering hospitality to wayfarers]. He suddenly notices three men [actually three angels in the guise of human beings] passing by him and he runs toward them and bows down before them. The third verse of Chapter 18 now reads as follows: "And [Abraham] said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy eyes, pass not, I pray, from thy servant." According to one reading of this verse in Genesis Rabbah cited in Rashi, the phrase, "my Lord, if now I have found favor in thy eyes, pass not, I pray, from thy servant" needs to be understood as being addressed to God and not to the three apparent mortals passing before him. Even though Abraham is in the middle of a conversation with God, he abruptly and appropriately puts God "on hold" as soon as his three potential human guests are sighted. This leads the Rabbis to formulate their famous statement that "Greater is hospitality to wayfarers than receiving the Divine Presence [*Shekhinah*]."[42]

The Netziv, in his gloss on this rabbinic formulation, says that it does

40. Genesis 17:23-27.
41. Genesis 18:1.
42. The *Babylonian Talmud, Shebu'oth*, tr. by A. E. Silverstone (London: Soncino Press, 1987), 35b. See also *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath*, 127a.

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not mean that the person receiving guests enjoys in the spiritual ontology of Judaism a higher status than someone communing with the Divine Presence, but that in cases of worldly tension or conflict between the two activities, receiving guests "trumps" receiving the *Shekhinah*. The reason for this (the Netziv says) is that a person relating to the *Shekhinah* is acting by way of fulfillment of the Divine imperative of "Love the Lord thy God"[43] — and upon this commandment there is no time constraint. It can be enacted in numerous forms (including that of prophetic encounter with God) at any time. But with guests, it is a matter of opportunity. Guests are not always available — and they are not always willing to come. It is for this reason that hosting guests overrides receiving the *Shekhinah*.[44]

The Netziv's rationale for assigning priority to guests over God provokes an immediate question. If there is greater intrinsic holiness attached to prophetic encounter over that of receiving guests, then one would think that it would neutralize and override in turn the diminished opportunities available for entertaining guests in contrast to loving God. Apparently, from the Netziv's perspective, the potentially divergent intrinsic weights of the two *mitzvot* of receiving God and receiving guests do not enter into account, because, given the irredeemably metaphoric nature of the Divine vocabulary, they are incalculable. The only things to go by are what human beings can reckon with. Opportunity costs can be taken into account, but a Divine perspective on reality can never be approximated. The Netziv reinforces this point of the inexorably human translatability of the category of prophecy by grounding prophecy in the commandment to love God. Prophecy is not a supernatural gift. It is a spiritual plateau that is a function of human exertions. It represents the culmination of efforts to purge propensities, inclinations, and attributes that deflect from pursuing what one is required to do. This is the naturalistic correlative to prophecy as a supernatural category[45] — and it is this correlative whose obligatory force can be traced to the verse "Love the Lord thy God." Apparently, from the negative theological perspective cultivated by the Netziv, it is impossible to know what things are like from the Divine side of the fence, but only to establish an order of priority for human actions and interactions

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43. Deuteronomy 6:5. This sentence constitutes the second verse of the first paragraph of the Shema.

44. *Chumash Haamek Davar: Bereshith* (Jerusalem: El Hamekoroth, 1966), p. 115.

45. For a discussion of the Talmudic and Maimonidean basis for this view, see Aryeh Botwinick, "A Maimonidean Reading of Luzzatto's *Mesillat Yesharim*," in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 7 (2000), No. 3, pp. 203-222.

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here below, based on a scheme of human exigencies and availabilities.

There are two striking analogues to the rabbinic statement in Shebu'oth 35b as interpreted by the Netziv. One concerns the fixing of the Jewish lunar calendar and determining the precise dates of the holidays and festivals, and the other relates to the procedural protocols relevant for reaching a Jewish legal decision. The Rabbis gloss the first commandment addressed to the Jewish community as a whole on the verge of their exodus from Egypt — "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you"[46] — as referring to the sanctification of the new moon which facilitates the fixing of the dates for holidays which, in turn, carry in their train a whole multitude of *mitzvot*. The Rabbis emphasize that this task of fixing the new moon and consequently the distribution and structuring of time reflected in the calendar as a whole is handed over to the jurisdiction of a Jewish tribunal — the Heavenly Court ratifies what the earthly Jewish court has decided.[47] Again, the exigencies of even Jewish religious life are accommodated from a thoroughly this-worldly perspective — where God is invoked as a background presence, but the maneuvers are all transparently earthly. Abraham's fashioning of a life of *mitzvot* by relegating God to the background becomes the model for his descendents at the time of the Exodus to create a concerted blueprint for Jewish living by fixing the times of the holidays that sidesteps the need for direct engagement of and ratification by God.

A third manifestation of this same effect of negative theology is evident with regard to the procedural norms relevant for reaching a Jewish legal decision. In Baba Metzia 59b, the Talmud discusses how Rabbi Eliezer, in order to establish the validity of his position in a dispute with Rabbi Joshua, says, "'If the Halakhah (law) agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!' Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: 'Why do ye dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the Halakhah agrees with him!' But Rabbi Joshua arose and exclaimed: 'It is not in heaven' [Deuteronomy 30:12]. What did he mean by this? — Said R. Jeremiah: that the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, 'After the majority must one incline' [Exodus 23:2]. Rabbi Nathan met Elijah and asked him: 'What did the Holy One, Blessed be

46. Exodus 12:2.

47. *Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah* 22a. This explication of the Talmudic statement follows the approach of the late Ponevezer Rav, Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman.

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He, do in that hour?' — He laughed [with joy], he replied, saying, 'My sons have defeated me, My sons have defeated Me'."[48]

According to the Malbim, the intimate bond between prophecy and Maasei Mitzvah (the performance of commandments) in Judaism is already communicated in the first verse of Chapter 18: "And the Eternal appeared unto him in the oaks of Mamre: and he sat in the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." The Malbim makes central to his reading of this verse its juxtaposition to Abraham's compliance with the Divine commandment to circumcise himself and the other male members of his household with which the previous chapter concludes.[49] As a result of his performance of the commandment of circumcision, Abraham has ascended the wrungs of holiness to such a degree that "God appeared to him" — as if to say in his merit, because of his exceptional spiritual state. According to the Malbim, the verse then goes on to enumerate some major countervailing factors which would seem to militate against the appearance of the *Shekhinah* that Abraham was able to triumph over, because he had performed the mitzvah of circumcision. First, Abraham is located in the "oaks of Mamre," far from any altar or any other holy setting. Second, he is sitting at "the entrance of the tent" in a social environment — positioned far from the loneliness and introspection which are psychological prerequisites for prophecy. Third, this event is occurring in "the heat of the day," when he is exhausted by the sun's rays and does not experience that physical serenity which is another prerequisite for prophecy. All of these derogating circumstances are not sufficient to inhibit a prophetic encounter in the face of Abraham's spiritual elevation achieved through the medium of the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision.[50]

What the Netziv and the Malbim's readings of the early verses in Parshat Vayeirah underscore is the indissoluble conceptual linkage (from a Jewish theological perspective) between prophecy, with centrality being assigned to the performance of *mitzvot*. Prophecy occasions the registering of an ontological gap. It is never the case with the unique and singular monotheistic God that He insistently and unambiguously thrusts Himself upon anyone so that there is no mistaking when a prophetic event is in progress. The unbridgeable distance that separates men from Him signifies that men have to consent to and take responsibility for identifying

48. The *Babylonian Talmud: Baba Metzia*, tr. by H. Freedman. (London: Soncino Press, 1986).

49. Genesis 17:23-27.

50. *Otzar Haperusghim: Malbim*, Vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Ayal Press, n.d.), p. 36.

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what is occurring as a prophetic event in order for a prophetic event in the fully accredited monotheistic sense to occur. Voluntarism, interventionism, and the exercise of independent judgment are the theological concomitances of monotheistic prophecy. Prophecy is far less an occasion for the manifestation of passivity — for purely receiving — than it is a moment of high activism where the energies of will and imagination are implicated and involved in shaping the character of the (ensuing) event. It is but a short step from prophecy conceived in this way to structuring a way of life for monotheistic believers in which doing (in the sense encapsulated in the phrase, "*maasei mitzvah*") is primary. The doing associated with the performance of *mitzvot* is the accessible, rationally-comprehensible, constitutive moment of the prophetic event.

In light of the interpretation, the coherence of the fit between the beginning and the end of Parshat Vayeirah can be appreciated. The beginning is about how the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision immediately leads into — and has as its reward (in the language of Pirkei Avot, "The reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah"[51]) — the performance of the mitzvah of Hachnasat Orchim (offering hospitality to wayfarers). The dynamic engendered by engagement in Maasei Mitzvah leads to the deferral and displacement of God, which paradoxically feeds not into Abraham's diminution, but his enhancement. The theme of the performance of *mitzvot* "trumping" Revelation and nurturing Abraham's spiritual enhancement is duplicated in the story of the *Akeidah*. The mitzvah of Pikuach Nefesh (saving a life — in this case, the life of his son) prompts Abraham to reconfigure and resolve the ambiguity attendant to prophetic encounter in the direction of primacy being assigned to human doing in the form dictated by *mitzvot* even as this becomes conducive to the endless deferral of the original Word of God.

Deferral and substitution (symbolized in the *Akeidah* story by Abraham's eventual sacrifice of a ram) become the hallmarks of the monotheistic believer and, by extension, evocative of the human condition as a whole. From a negative theological perspective, two institutional mechanisms become inescapable as mediating factors between the Word of God and the religious life of the community: consent and tradition. The way to conceptualize early communities of monotheistic believers is as having been constituted by tissues of consent tendered by their prophets and leaders as to what they take to be the Word of God. There is no construal of the Word without consent being encoded in the very activity of interpretation. For

51. Avot 4:2.

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later communities of monotheistic believers, it would be sociologically ludicrous to assign primacy to consent, since most people are simply born into and raised within these communities, and their intersubjective understanding of the world and of their identities are formed within them. This is not to say that consent is not important, as witness the phenomena of apostasy and conversion, and the efflorescence of movements of return and of revivalist movements in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But once these communities are well-established, tradition plays a much more significant role than consent in accounting for their structure and functioning.

Levinas seems to have grasped better than Leibowitz the *Akeidah*'s negative theological import. Commenting on Kierkegaard, Levinas writes that "Kierkegaard has a predilection for the biblical story of the sacrificing of Isaac. Thus, he describes the encounter with God as a subjectivity rising to the religious level: God above the ethical order! His interpretation of this story can doubtless be given a different orientation. Perhaps Abraham's ear for hearing the voice that brought him back to the ethical order was the highest moment in this drama."[52] To reinforce this point, Levinas invokes part of the *Akeidah*'s previously mentioned biblical context, i.e., Abraham's interceding on behalf of the doomed people of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Why does Kierkegaard never speak of the dialogue in which Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah on behalf of the just who may be present there? . . . That he [Abraham] obeyed the first voice is astonishing: that he had sufficient distance with respect to that obedience to hear the second voice [which forbade him to sacrifice Isaac] — that is essential."[53]

In the *Akeidah*, Abraham is at the beginning of the negative theological line that culminates in Levinas' interpretation of Yossel Rakover's creed: "I love him, but I love even more his Torah. . . . And even if I were deceived by him and became disillusioned, I should nevertheless observe the precepts of the Torah."[54] Abraham resolves the dilemma in which God has thrust him with his ostensible command to sacrifice his son by distinguishing between the negative theological God and His Torah. The

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52. Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, tr. by Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 74. For a discussion of where Derrida fits on the interpretive spectrum of the *Akeidah* between Levinas and Leibowitz, see Dominic Moran, "Decisions, Decisions: Derrida on Kierkegaard and Abraham," in *Telos* 123 (Spring 2002), pp. 107-130.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

54. Emmanuel Levinas, "Loving the Torah more than God," in his *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, tr. by Sean Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 144.

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sacrifice of his son could only issue from the former (in a paradoxical sense), but not from the latter.[55] As a prophetic deliverance of the negative theological God, the command to sacrifice his son is hedged about with all of those imponderables that serve as an invitation for the assertion of human freedom and the assumption of human responsibility. Abraham rises to the occasion and offers a model of the monotheistic believer as a radically individual and individuated self.

A major political lesson of this rabbinic reading of the *Akeidah* is that if there are no externally certified absolutes, then human life is actualized as bundles of energy that with slight shifts in direction can be either hugely constructive or immensely destructive. Hans Morgenthau captures this in his analysis of the relation between love and power: "Love and power both try to overcome loneliness, and the sense of man's insufficiency stemming from his loneliness, through duplication of his individuality. . . . Love is reunion through spontaneous mutuality, and power seeks to create a union through unilateral imposition. . . . Master and subject are at the bottom of their souls lovers who have gone astray."[56]

An Un-Kierkegaardian Postscript

This reading of the *Akeidah* is diametrically opposed to Kierkegaard's.[57] The pivot of the story is the ethical suspension of the theological, or, rather, how negative theology demands a suspension of the "theological" in favor of the ethical. For Kierkegaard, the story revolves around "the theological suspension of the ethical."[58] He writes: "Abraham is the representative of faith, and that faith is normally expressed in him whose life is not merely the most paradoxical that can be thought, but so paradoxical that it cannot be thought at all. He acts by virtue of the absurd, for it is precisely absurd that he as the particular is higher than the universal."[59] "The knight of faith renounces the universal in order to become the individual."[60] For him, "subjectivity is higher than

55. This reading is compatible with the view of the Rabbis that Abraham (and the other two patriarchs) fulfilled the words of the Torah before it was officially given.

56. See Hans J. Morgenthau, "Love and Power," in Morgenthau, *The Restoration of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 8 and 13, cited in Fred Alford, *An Essay on Levinas and Human Relations* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, forthcoming).

57. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness unto Death*, tr. by Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1954).

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-77.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

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reality."[61] According to Kierkegaard: "there is a paradox, that the individual as the individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute/or Abraham is lost."[62] The human condition with regard to God reduces to a dichotomy: "He who loves God without faith reflects upon himself, he who loves God believingly reflects upon God."[63]

From a negative theological perspective, this is a false dichotomy. Since man never apprehends God in any humanly graspable sense, negative theology willy-nilly collapses the second alternative into the first. No matter how far one goes in the search for God, one cannot escape "reflecting upon oneself. Kierkegaard is in the paradoxical position of going part of the way with negative theology, by imagining God to be so utterly distant that only a subjectivist or absurdist leap is sufficient to negotiate Him. Yet, once the leap has been made, so that faith is experienced as one's "highest passion,"[64] one is then authentically in the presence of God. Then, one's moral scruples can be overcome, as Kierkegaard thinks Abraham apparently did, whereby killing one's own son is the highest divine imperative. What certifies to the command's veracity is plumbing the depths of one's subjectivity and reading what one finds there as the Word of God.

Another problem with Kierkegaard's argument about the absurdist character of religion is that there appears to be nothing to contrast it with outside of the sphere of religion. From a Kiekegaardian perspective, reason and morality, which loom as the natural contrastive categories to religion, can also be interpreted as representing absurdist leaps. From an absolutist philosophical perspective they, too, rest on irrationalist foundations.[65] Reason and morality work once one accepts their premises and draws out the appropriate inferences. Yet, the premises cannot be validated without giving rise to an infinite regress.

Kierkegaard hypostatizes the metaphysical distance separating man from the biblical God into a substantive postulate. On special occasions, and especially in relation to exceptional individuals, God requires one to be faithful to (and practice one's commitment to) the Absurd (His Absurdly unbridgeable distance) by subverting the claims of traditional ethics. God tests men to see whether they prize His Absurd Unfathomableness above

61. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
65. Cf. Leo Strauss, "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy," in *The Independent Journal of Philosophy/Unabhangige Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, No. 3 (1979), pp. 111-18.

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His Torah, with its many rationally accessible commandments. Kierkegaard's credo contradicts negative theology. He transforms not-knowing and not-relating-to God into forms of knowing and relating.

Kierkegaard exemplifies the Gnostic character of fundamental Christian theological symbols, and how they are derived from a perverted reading of the *Akeidah*. A rabbinically-grounded, negative theological reading of the *Akeidah* ensures that the Word of God never becomes flesh. In these readings, the preliminary questioning of whether there is a word (which negative theology can never guarantee) debars one from ever gaining reliable access to its content. In these readings, Abraham's faithfulness to the principle of the unbridgeable distance separating him (and all others) from God puts the onus of responsibility on him, as to whether there is such a Word of God as the one that tells him to sacrifice his son. From a rabbinic vantage point, the preliminary formal question displaces the later substantive question. The author of the command that tells Abraham to sacrifice his son remains inaccessible, so that the substantive absurd requirement to suspend the ethical does not have a chance to become binding. The question of whether there is a question here — of whether God could be the author of such a command to sacrifice Abraham's son — looms so central and devastating that it preempts subsidiary questions, such as how to reconcile one's concept of God with common understandings of rationality and morality, to which Kierkegaard's notion of the Absurd constitutes a response. From a rabbinic perspective, the preliminary question inspired by negative theology usurps the whole space of inquiry and does not allow the secondary Kierkegaardian questions to be even properly articulated. The upshot of focusing on the preliminary question is to augment a sense of human freedom — to underscore the conceptual indissolubility between negative theology and the expansion of human freedom. As Silvano Arieti has argued,[66] as a result of his experience in the *Akeidah* (as rabbinically interpreted) Abraham becomes the first modern individual.

The difference between the rabbinical and Kierkegaard's reading is that Kierkegaard invokes the category of the Absurd in order to *annul* distance, whereas for the former the Absurd merely *characterizes* the distance between God and man. The Absurd is a way of capturing the distance, of describing it without annulling it. It is absurd in the sense that an inaccessible God should occupy such a central place in the lives of monotheistic believers. If the distance separating man and God is not

66. Silvano Arieti, *Abraham and the Contemporary Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

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annulled, then it becomes possible for all sorts of disciplines, such as cosmology and astrophysics, to have some input (in however tenuous and inconclusive a way) to the question of God. Since both the categories used and the reality (realities) they unearth and crystallize evolve over time,[67] there is no way of securely predicting how the world will appear to people fifty or a hundred years hence. Negative theology becomes a gigantic place-holder for all of the reports concerning the nature of reality that the future holds in store. These reports will each in its own way set the stage for new emotional configurations depicting how the individual believer relates to God. A commitment to negative theology suspends a final delimitation of the relation between the objective and the subjective, leaving it open to future experience to redefine what is objectively out there and what is subjectively experienced. Unlike Kierkegaard, who wants to make one arrested moment of 19th century subjectivity reign supreme over all future organizations of experience, the negative theological believer retains his commitment to the fluidity of the passage of time and suspends a final determination of the categories of the objective and the subjective.

Kierkegaard concludes his reading of the *Akeidah* by saying: "He who is willing to work gives birth to his own father."[68] This, however, epitomizes the rabbinical reading of the *Akeidah*, not Kierkegaard's. In the rabbinical interpretation, Abraham individuates himself in relation to God. He realizes that he is bereft of cognitive resources to still doubt that the concept of God might be a projection. The man of faith is defined as precisely he who remains faithful to his doubts, even as he insists that faith requires him to entertain the prospect that there might be a God in a fully transcendent sense governing human affairs. Faith does not dispel doubt, but responds to its full challenge by doubting doubt itself. It attempts to push doubt to its limits, and thereby carves out a niche for itself. As the biblical paradigm of the man of faith, Abraham goes through precisely this trajectory, occasioned by a testing of the limits of the human condition. Faith and doubt continually expose their epiphenomenal status in relation to each other, and what becomes most urgent is the need to set limits to the limits (to give them some conceptual and emotional structure so that one can move beyond them) in order to get on with the business of living.

Through this struggle to define the distance between man and God, which gives rise to the most genuine belief possible, Abraham translates

67. Cf. Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. xi.

68. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

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belief into a set of humanly accessible categories, which, since there is no original against which to compare the translations, means that they need to be viewed as metaphors of metaphors reflecting inwardly upon themselves. The Rabbis take their cue from the prophet Micah in identifying Abraham with the attribute of "kindness."[69] This is not an additional attribute superimposed on faith. From a rabbinic perspective, kindness is rather what monotheistic faith becomes when its origins in a community of finite human beings are carefully assessed. When it cannot ascend outward and upward to reach its target, belief descends back into the human world from which it derives as a spirit of adjustment and accommodation.

In a crude metaphoric sense, it could be said that Abraham gives birth to his own Father, while acknowledging the possibility of His independent reality. He sets the stage for Isaac doing likewise (achieving a comparable individuation) in relation to him. As a distinct human being, Abraham is the repository of all of that unfathomable otherness that characterizes everyone as a separate human being. In his interactionist mode as Isaac's father, he helps to shape multiple contexts of relations with him, whose cumulative impact fosters an attitude of dependency. However, as the repository of an unbreachable otherness, he subliminally signals to Isaac how he, too, in significant ways, falls outside of the relation of dependence. The counterparts to the faith and the doubt modes of human-divine relation dramatized by Abraham in the *Akeidah* are the interactionist and "otherist" modes of parent-offspring relations. Sustained interaction between parent and child nurtures the imputation of a larger-than-life, almost God-like role to the parent doing the relating. The "otherist" perception of the parent as a full-fledged other restores irrevocable distance to the relation, and works to engender in the child an awareness of the limits of both the parent and child-like roles — an awareness that harbors the prospect of enabling the child to chart his own course toward independence. Abraham's enactment of how the mutual limits of faith and doubt enabled him to achieve, as it were, an independent stance in relation to God (an independence, moreover, that can be seen as constitutive of religious faith and practice) models for Isaac how he needs to negotiate the mutual limits between parental interaction and parental otherness in order to become who he is destined to become in the world.

If, as rabbinically construed, Abraham becomes the prototype of the modern individual, Abraham as delineated by Kierkegaard, becomes the

69. Micah 7:20: "Grant truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham, as You swore to our forefathers from ancient times."

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prototype of the fascist reaction to modernity. Kierkegaardian *subjectivity* stands poised to deny *subjectivities*. It has no resources against a subjectivity that seeks to aggrandize to itself all other subjectivities. In the end, its inability to sustain divine distance tells against its ability to sustain distance between human beings. In Kierkegaard's account, in order to resolve his crisis of individuation, Abraham has to claim a strict knowledge of man's relation to God that both sanctions and impels him to sacrifice his son. This gnosis is called the Absurd, but should not be mistaken as involving a renunciation of the claims to knowledge. The force of the category of the Absurd is to arrest the fluidity and unbridgeability attendant by negative theology's postulation of endless distance between man and God, and to transform this very boundlessness and inaccessibility into a type of reified knowledge. A leap to the Absurd requires the sacrifice of one's son and the suspension of ethical requirements. In Kierkegaard, the Word is brought down to earth. It is made flesh, so that by way of conformity to an Absurd Abraham's sacrifice of his son becomes Divine Imperative.

Kierkegaard's interpretation of the *Akeidah* casts a retrospective light on key Christian theological symbols. God becoming human in defiance of all canons of rationality and in defiance of the logic of negative theology (this particular instrumentalization of the Absurd) provides Christianity with the assurance it needs to assert itself (the certain road map) and to make its way in the world. In that central Christian symbolism, Jesus reenacts the *Akeidah* story. Through its absurdist subversion of ethical values emphasizing the sanctity of human life, his self-sacrifice attests to the paramountcy of God in the world. The literally non-negotiable Word of God becoming flesh through the intermediacy of the category of the Absurd (the very logically and ethically transgressive character of this formulation attesting to its theological depth) enables the conceptually, existentially, unbridgeably-distant God to enter the world and to become a source of charismatic certainty for projects undertaken in His name.

The Gnostic perversion of distance embodied in Christianity is emulated by Hitler. He, too, is privy to a master-plan for redeeming humanity that, paradoxically, just like Christianity, invokes its very absurdity as proof of its authenticity. The mass destruction of millions of human beings becomes the prerequisite for the spiritual regeneration of mankind. As with the unbridgeable distance of God in the Christian symbolism, the unfathomable otherness of human beings is breached by the absurd sacrifice of human life — Jesus giving up his life to make God manifest in the world; the Nazis exterminating millions of Jews and others to eradicate

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the "vermin" that lurks in unrecoverable distances. Gnosis-absurdity-salvation becomes the hidden trinity governing Christianity and Nazism.

The largest background issue at stake in this reading of the *Akeidah* versus Kierkegaard's thus turns out to be how to theorize the nature of Western faith. Kierkegaard defines faith in a Gnostic quasi-Christian vein: it becomes worship of the Absurd — the worship of Unreason. He cannot rest content with emptiness (which is where monotheistic theology, pushed to its rational limits, ends up). It is as if Kierkegaard needs to reify emptiness — to give it a content of its own — which he achieves through his visage of the term "Absurd." Armed with this concept of faith, Kierkegaard projects Abraham in a quasi-Christian light: "Abraham was greater than all, great by reason of his power whose strength is impotence, great by reason of his wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by reason of his hope whose form is madness, great by reason of the love which is hatred of oneself."[70] In Kierkegaard's version of the *Akeidah*, Abraham *knows* that God wants his foolishness and madness.[71] If the distance between God and man is really unbridgeable, then Abraham does not know what Kierkegaard attributes to him. As a matter of strict monotheistic logic, both a rational response (which preserves the primacy of the ethical) and an irrational response to God's request (which subverts the primacy of the ethical) lack theological foundation. From the perspective of an inaccessible God, both

70. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

71. Kierkegaard's proto-Christian casting of Abraham is reinforced in Walter Lowrie's translation of the key Hebrew word *Nisayon* as "temptation," rather than as "test" or "trial." (There are some exceptions: on p. 42 of the Lowrie translation, the word "test," rather than "temptation," is used, while "trial" and "base temptation" are also contrasted. On p. 70, the two English translations of the term *Nisayon* are conflated). Generally, however, the word "temptation" is used. This translation is already misleadingly freighted in the direction of Christianity (highlighting the ways in which the *Akeidah* serves as the theological inspiration for the Crucifixion). *Nisayon* is more appropriately translated as test or trial, rather than as temptation. Test suggests that there does not have to be a preordained right answer. The same is true of trial. A trial can end up illustrating the irrelevance of having had a trial in the first place. Analogously, virtually everything can be put to a test, even the concept of testing itself, and whether one is in fact (or should be undergoing) a test. The concept of test is formal and open-ended in ways that the notion of temptation is not. One is tempted from a right path to pursue a wrong path, thereby presupposing that the rightness and the wrongness of the paths are already known. From a rabbinic perspective, the point of the *Akeidah* story is that this is not the case with God's demand that Abraham sacrifice his son. It is the whole reality of the test (whether there is in fact a test) that is being tested in the rabbinic understanding of the *Akeidah* narrative. Given the monotheistic delineation of the nature of God, it is the limit of human freedom — where man trails off and God begins; or, conversely, where God trails off and man begins — that is being worked out in the *Akeidah* story.

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responses are equally irrational. Both represent the assertion of radical freedom on Abraham's part. The advantage of a rational response is that it is less likely to engender the illusion in Abraham or his audience that God's very insurmountable distance yields a distinct "ethic" of its own: the irrational — doing what traditional human canons of rationality and morality invalidate — becomes symptomatic of a new divine rationality. The Absurd and Absolutely Defiant become domesticated into a new set of "rational" religious protocols. As a result, the installation of the self in place of the unreachable God has been negotiated under the auspices of a subtle, but ultimately self-deceiving set of subterfuge. The Christianized understanding of faith that Kierkegaard both presupposes and elaborates is also manifested in the way he treats some central topics in the theory and experience of faith: inwardness and concealment; law; death; philosophy and the doubter; repentance; and, cyclical versus linear conceptions of time.

1. ***Inwardness and Concealment.*** Kierkegaard writes: "Faith . . . is the paradox that inwardness is higher than outwardness. . . . The paradox of faith is this, that there is an inwardness which is incommensurable for the outward, an inwardness . . . which is not identical with the first but is a new inwardness."[72] Then, he discusses the paradox of Abraham's faith as not permitting "mediation."[73] Presumably, in Kierkegaard's vision of faith, the inwardness which is incommensurable with outwardness sets man on an unmediated "movement of infinity," when, unexpectedly, "by virtue of the Absurd, faith enters upon the scene."[74] Correlative to Kierkegaard's concept of inwardness is his notion of concealment: "The individual regarded as he is immediately, that is, as a physical and psychical being, is the hidden, the concealed."[75]

Understood negative-theologically, monotheism denies that there is such an inwardness and concealment. Negative theology stipulates that the litany of descriptions that are ascribed to God have to be understood metaphorically. There is no way of grasping what God is in and for Himself. Therefore, all essentialist, inward-turning adjectives applied to Him immediately have to be given an externalized, action-oriented translation. In a more standardized idiom: no one knows what God is; one can only know what He does through the actions attributed to Him. But, when ascribed to God, action verbs are as metaphoric as are nouns of attribution such as

72. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

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omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence. Further complicating the picture is that it is impossible to consistently sustain the notion that even action verbs, such as those denoting creation and involvement in human affairs ascribed to God, can serve as a metaphoric representation of Him. There is no original distinct from the metaphoric action verbs and nouns of attribution that one uses to describe God in terms of which to compare whether the verbs and nouns are well-chosen. In other words, the covert subject of God-metaphors is man, not because there is no God (that remains an open question), but because the inability to securely get to Him postulated by negative theology means that all efforts at description of Him can only reflect back to those attempting to approach Him. The collective image of human nature unremittingly translating "Hidden" Divine Essence into "Open" Divine Action is one of action constantly usurping the role of thought and emotion — of exteriority continually displacing interiority. Since man's projections of God cannot have an external divine referent, their only possible referents are human beings.

This negative-theological account of human nature is radically anti-Kierkegaardian. There is no inwardness except as an ideal limit — a conceptual foil — to outwardness. The under-determination that serves as a metaphysical backdrop to negative theology is transposed into a self-definition. The concept of God can become available in one's life both by claiming to know Him *and* as a function of one's uncertainty, as a possible hypothesis. What lends support to the latter view is its parsimony: its ontological commitment is much leaner. Faith can loom as central in one's life both because one knows that there is a God, or because there might be one. Religious experience can be sustained either way. The theory of divinity is under-determined by the facts of religious life. Those facts are consistent both with a *certain* and a *possible* claim to God's existence.

The hiatus that opens up from the perspective of under-determination between thought-constructs and the experience that they are meant to explain suggests that the proper way to construe these thought-constructs is as species of actions, as forms of doing, as modes of action, rather than as epitomizing some other higher domain altogether. Extrapolating from negative theology to human self-understanding, under-determination can be applied in more mundane settings (how more than one set of theoretical formulations can usually make sense of a given set of facts), evoking the specter of "doing" (a denial of "inwardness" that precedes or is otherwise anterior to doing) emerging as the master category for making sense of all levels of articulation of the human mode of being in the world.

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Similarly, from a negative theological perspective, concealment needs to be delegitimated as an ontological category. Thus, in Judaism, by following the Divine Commandments (*Maasei Mitzvah*) individuals disclose themselves to themselves and others. Yet, some concealment always remains. These disclosures are always partial. The negative theological trajectory is not, as in Kierkegaard, from total concealment (the inward self-communing with itself) setting the stage for the total disclosure of God through the descent into the Absurd and the encounter that presumably takes place there. This trajectory goes from partial disclosure through doing to a partial concealment constituting the respite between acts of doing to partial disclosure again, without any finality. In other words, the human terrain of action is never lost sight of for one instant. The total concealment integral to Kierkegaard's concept of the individual is the flip side of total disclosure. The one is as impossible as the other. In practice, the translation of this Gnostic ideal (of total immersion in concealment) often leads to the charismatic leader claiming to have scaled the heights (or plumbed the depths) of becoming a total individual, while the rest of society shares in his achievement only by conforming to his directives and thereby experiencing his echoes.

2. ***Law***. Taking his cue from a famous passage in Luke 14:26, Kierkegaard denigrates the role of law in religious life. The passage in Luke reads as follows: "If any man cometh unto me and hateth not his own father and mother and wife and children and brethen and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Transposing this passage to the case of Abraham in the *Akeidah*, Kierkegaard writes: "Only at the moment when his act is in absolute contradiction to his feeling is his act a sacrifice, but the reality of his act is the factor by which he belongs to the universal, and in that aspect he is and remains a murderer. Moreover, the passage in Luke must be understood in such a way as to make it clearly evident that the knight of faith has no higher expression of the universal (i.e., the ethical) by which he can save himself."[76] For Kierkegaard, the knight of faith becomes a law unto himself. From the negative theology perspective of monotheism found in Judaism and the centrality that it assigns to law (*Halacha*), this status of being a law unto himself is not available to anyone, including leaders and prophets. The centrality of law in Judaism belies Kierkegaard's reading of the *Akeidah*, which assigns to the suspension of the law higher status than compliance with it. Negative theological religion, which remains faithful to the premise of unbridgeability between man and God, can only offer

76. *Ibid.*, p. 84

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the prospect (at least within the confines of this life) of partial redemptions attained through the sanctification of particular moments of everyday life enshrined in Jewish law. Kierkegaard, who suspends unabridgeability, becomes a trader in the prospects of total redemptions, which countenance and encourage the evisceration of the mechanisms of law.

3. ***Death***. Kierkegaard brands as "crass materialism" the claim that "no one can experience death before he actually dies."[77] He seems to want to control death by dying while he is alive. This is presumably the state achieved during the period of "infinite resignation," which is the spiritual phase that immediately precedes faith.[78] Here, Kierkegaard once again deviates sharply from a negative theological construal of the tenets of monotheism. On a deep psychological level, monotheistic religion, with its constitutive uncertainties, is also about learning how to relinquish control over one's own dying. It is about learning how to live all the moments of human existence until the very end.

4. ***Philosophy and the Doubter***. Kierkegaard's concept of philosophy is as vulnerable as his understanding of religion. "Philosophy teaches that the immediate must be annulled (*aufgehoben*)."[79] Presumably, one can locate the immediate in philosophy; it is only a question of then transforming it into something else. As philosophers from Plato to Nietzsche have sometimes intimated, in philosophy one cannot deal with the immediate. The philosophized, theorized "immediate" (no matter how carefully analytically honed) is already always beyond the immediacy of "sheer experience." This runs parallel to the case of God in religion. Negative theology is the outcome of the realization that God as a discursive concept already subsists beyond a literal plane, and can only be related to as a metaphor. Both philosophy and faith are about confronting the implications of inhabiting a "metaphysical middle."

In his ideal-typological portrait of the doubter, Kierkegaard duplicates the distortions manifested in his account of faith. On the one hand, he gives a faithful rendition of the doubter's spiritual quest: "The doubter hungers just as much for the daily bread of joy as for the food of the spirit."[80] The description is evocative of Hölderlin's analysis of the

77. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57. As Lowrie points out in his notes, the Danish original for resignation harbors more activist connotations than the pristine English word, and the Danish original more closely approximates renunciation. See note 37, p. 266.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

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doubter's spiritual state: "Believe me, the skeptic finds contradiction and imperfection in all that is thought, because he knows the harmony of perfect beauty, which is never thought. The dry bread that human reason well-meaningly offers him he disdains because he is secretly feasting at the table of the gods."[81] The skeptic's urge toward wholeness and perfection is manifested negatively in his critical dissection of existing viewpoints. In this negative, indirect way, he is able to sustain the ideal character of the unblemished argument. Where Kierkegaard goes astray is in pointing to the Absurd as the culmination of the epistemological quest conceived as a spiritual journey: "If on the other hand the doubter is able to become the particular individual who as the individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, then he can get a warrant for his silence. . . . In this case, he is within the paradox."[82] As in the case of the knight of faith, Kierkegaard overlooks how the doubter's spiritual quest can be validated just as much by endless prolongation of his skeptical activities as by an Absurd catapult into "an absolute relation to the absolute." Process, movement, and unattainability can be as symptomatic of the highest levels of spiritual achievement as stasis, consummation and realized substance. Consummation, climax, Faith (with a capital F) are after all in their origins only words — and their virtuality is best preserved by not covering-up the ontological distance that separates them from the phenomena they seek to capture.

5. ***Repentance.*** Kierkegaard's philosophy of repentance shares the corruption of his philosophy of action. He theorizes repentance as involving an "infinite movement," and then making "still one more movement by virtue of the Absurd."[83] The familiar Kierkegaardian pattern is reasserted. Repentance involves an absolute turning — an "infinite movement" — that serves as a prelude to one's embrace of the Absurd. In repenting one positions oneself in such a way as to cut oneself off from one's previous mode of existence — so that one's life from the moment of repentance onwards assumes an entirely new character steeped in an awareness of the Absurd — Kierkegaard abolishes altogether the process-character of repentance. For him, it partakes of a substantive transformation that liberates one from his religious life and sets the stage (figuratively speaking) for the assumption of a new life.

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81. Friedrich Holderlin, *Hyperion or the Hermit in Greece*, tr. by W.R. Trask (New York: Ungar, 1965), p. 93; cited in Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, eds., *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 149.

82. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

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From a negative theological perspective, the picture is thoroughly inverted. Transformation and redemption are only partial and ongoing, and one never becomes a new being, but only deepens his habitation of his old being.[84] One of the metaphysical puzzles surrounding the concept of repentance is how a new thought can nullify what has taken place in the past, so that through the act of repentance one's sins are, as it were, wiped away. What gives a current event such vast retroactive power over the past? Maimonides' answer is to make the whole process of repentance dependent on a person's belief system. If a person believes that a "fracture can never be remedied," then that very belief alters the nature of the action performed. It becomes the sort of action from which no amelioration is possible. However, if the person who engages in the action believes in repentance, then this belief transforms behavior, making it much more provisional and open-ended. What, then, is an action according to Maimonides? It is a combination of physical and muscular movements, and a thought-construct that interprets those movements. Strictly speaking, the only actions that are past, that are irrevocably gone, are physical and muscular movements. But the interpretive frameworks under which particular sequences of physical and muscular movements might be subsumed are potentially infinite. The physical descriptions of a particular event are sufficiently indeterminate to square with an indefinite range of interpretations of the same event. From an interpretive perspective, therefore, no action is ever complete, since the class of possible descriptions of what happened remain open.

In a crucial sense, therefore, personal identity needs to be construed analogously with the negative theological definition of God. Just as one can only say what God is not, so, too, with regard to human actions — and, *a fortiori*, with regard to persons, who are summations of their actions — one can only say what they are not. Given the distinction between physical movements and interpretive frameworks, one's ascription of positive

84. For a classic formulation of this understanding of repentance, see Maimonides, *Guide*, *op. cit.*, Part III, Ch. 36, p. 540. In his philosophy of repentance (*Teshuvah*), he deconstructs the concept of an action and shows how barely intelligible it is: "It is manifest that repentance also belongs to this class, I mean to the opinions without the belief in which the existence of individuals professing a Law cannot be well ordered. For an individual cannot but sin and err, either through ignorance — by professing an opinion or a moral quality that is not preferable in truth — or else because he is overcome by desire or anger. If then the individual believed that this fracture can never be remedied, he would persist in his error and sometimes perhaps disobey even more because of the fact that no stratagem remains at his disposal. If, however, he believes in repentance, he can correct himself and return to a better and more perfect state than the one he was in before he sinned."

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content can proceed indefinitely. The content of any action or any person remains inexhaustible, and permanently frustrates attempts to achieve closure on the question of who or what individuals or actions really are.

6. ***Cyclical Versus Linear Concepts of Time***. Kierkegaard concludes with the astounding claim that only by adhering to his concept of faith, which links faith to the Absurd, can one avoid once and for all cyclical concepts of time. The case is exactly the opposite: his concept of faith leads to an inescapable cyclicity, whereas a more negative-theologically inspired reading of monotheistic faith is more likely to sustain linearity. He makes his point by telling a story about Heraclitus: "Heraclitus the obscure said, 'One cannot pass twice through the same stream'."[85] Kierkegaard apparently interprets this statement as evoking that deep subjectivity that he thinks heralds faith. One cannot pass through the same stream twice, because one's subjective impressions and reactions change each time. From Kierkegaard's perspective, Heraclitus is privy to the transformational role that deep subjectivity plays in the lives of human beings, and thus becomes Kierkegaard's precursor. Kierkegaard goes on to recount: "Heraclitus the obscure had a disciple who did not stop with that, he went further and added, 'One cannot do it even once.' Poor Heraclitus, to have such a disciple! By this amendment the thesis of Heraclitus was so improved that it became an Eleatic thesis which denies movement, and yet that disciple desired only to be a disciple of Heraclitus . . . and to go further — not back to the position Heraclitus had abandoned."[86]

Kierkegaard thus concludes with a parable of cyclicality emerging triumphant if one seeks to go beyond the subjectivity that he thinks is constitutive of faith. His very concept of faith connects it with subjectivity and the Absurd, and the abrogation of metaphysical distance ensures the ongoing triumph of cyclicality. From a negative theological perspective, when the Absurd is invoked as merely one of the innumerable metaphors of God, and is not literalized or appropriated by human subjectivity, the very openness of possibilities which restores maximum freedom and responsibility nourishes a movement of time that stretches endlessly forward. It is the abrogation of metaphysical distance in Kierkegaardian theology that restores cyclicality in the life-rhythms of individual believers and religious communities.

Kierkegaard's most synoptic statement concerning the nature of faith defines it as "shutting one's eyes" and "plunging confidently into the

85. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
86. *Ibid.*

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Absurd."[87] Biblical faith understood negative-theologically can almost be portrayed in opposite terms. From a biblical vantage point, faith is reachable only with one's eyes wide open. The postulates of faith are a natural response to the incompleteness of experience. This incompleteness is manifested in multiple dimensions: in the time-bound nature of human existence; in the unpredictable fluctuations of historical fortune affecting both nations and individuals; in the discordances between the ways a person actually develops, and the multiple ways in which, with slight shifts in fortune, he might have developed; and in the ways in which what is happening in the world — and what is occurring in oneself — can be grasped by divergent (and sometimes even incompatible) conceptual frameworks. As formulated in the biblical narrative, monotheism posits God as the outermost limit of human explanatory frameworks. In order to serve as such (so that the quest cannot be pressed any higher than Him), He has to be denuded of any connection with things human, which means that, in a literal sense. He cannot explain anything. In monotheistic theology, God merely serves as a symbolic reminder of the limits of all human explanations. Invoking God to make sense of oneself and the world provides a more expansive horizon to acknowledge the perdurability of one's questions. The concept of God restores and confirms the ongoing vitality of one's questions.

The personal biblical God to whom prayers are addressed (not just the philosophers' God) needs to be approached in an analogous way. In His encompassing presence, the limits imposed by one's needs and the repertoire of available responses can be better accommodated. The monotheistic God provides no answers. He legitimates questions by permitting the most expansive horizons of inquiry in relation to which to conduct one's personal quests for justification and salvation, and one's disinterested pursuits of knowledge and truth. Monotheistic faith is not bad faith in the Sartrean sense. It does not abrogate responsibility in any sense; and it does not lighten any burden of guilt or the need for inquiry or discussion. Monotheistic faith is a classic response to, or a classic conceptual representation of, the limits of the human condition. For individual believers, it offers the additional solace that by integrating its outlook, subsidiary beliefs, rituals, and practices into their everyday consciousness they are enabled to "play life" for what it is worth, without either over-inflating the game or "under-committing" their talents.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

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Coda*: Islam, Again*

Islamic terrorism evokes a central term in the Muslim religious and political vocabulary — *jihad*.[88] Bernard Lewis defines Muslim fundamentalists (the chief architects and perpetrators of *jihad*) "as those who feel that the troubles of the Muslim world at the present time are the result not of insufficient modernization but of excessive modernization. From their point of view, the primary struggle is not against the Western enemy as such but against the Westernizing enemies at home, who have imported and imposed infidel ways on Muslim peoples. The task of the Muslims is to . . . return to a purely Islamic way of life, in accordance with the principles of Islam and the rules of the Holy Law."[89] According to Lewis, the true precursors of contemporary Muslim terrorists were the 11th-13th-century members of the Muslim sect known as the Assassins. Their hostility and violence were primarily directed "against their own leaders, whom they saw as impious usurpers."[90] The Assassins was the name given to the group by their Muslim enemies. Their self-chosen name was *fidayeen* ("those who are ready to sacrifice their lives for their cause"). The Muslim terrorists' challenge for America then becomes "the resumption of the war for the religious dominance of the world that began in the seventh century."[91] Correspondingly, America's challenge for the terrorists is that it "represents the greatest threat to the kind of Islam they wish to impose on their fellow-Muslims."

The picture conjured up by Muslim terrorist activities is that of a Gnostically-saturated Muslim world intoxicated by the truth of its own doctrines and practices, which seeks to high-handedly impose them on the rest of the world. As already indicated, this Gnosticism finds expression in the Islamic fundamentalists' rejection of traditionalism as reflecting too many compromises with the exigencies of everyday life,

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88. In Bernard Lewis' exposition: "One of the basic tasks bequeathed to Muslims by the Prophet was *jihad*. This word, which literally means 'striving,' was usually cited in the Koranic phrase 'striving in the path of God' and was interpreted to mean armed struggle for the defense or advancement of Muslim power. In principle, the world was divided into two houses: the House of Islam, in which a Muslim government ruled and Muslim law prevailed, and the House of War, the rest of the world, still inhabited and, more important, ruled by infidels. Between the two, there was to be a perpetual state of war until the entire world either embraced Islam or submitted to the rule of the Muslim state." See Bernard Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam," in *The New Yorker* (Nov. 19, 2001), p. 52.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 61

91. *Ibid.*, p. 63. Cf. also Luciano Pellicani, "Islam and the West," in *Telos* 121 (Fall 101), pp. 86-112.

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and a consequent return to a firebrand textualism that seeks to be guided by the literalist force of the Koranic text. The Koran contains many passages that seem to support the terrorists' violent political program.[92] But, surprisingly, it also contains many passages that invite a negative theological reading suggestive of theological and political openness and the non-appropriability of God.

The image presented in the bellicose passages in the Koran is one of a religion assured of its monopolistic possession of truth waging enduring battle against the unfaithful, and secure in its ultimate triumph over them. In these passages, the palpable and concrete have overwhelmed the abstract and transcendent. The Koran provides a materialist vision of Paradise, inventorying in doting detail the physical pleasures awaiting the faithful willing to be "slain in the cause of God." Presumably, the faithful will even confront God face to face, when all the metaphors, intermediaries, and veils that have hitherto blocked direct relation with Him are finally removed, as heaven is rolled up "like a scroll of parchment." In this sort of Gnostic context, it is no wonder that the Koran displays a keen suspicion of and hostility toward tradition, which consists of an ongoing series of institutionalized displacements and deferrals of the Charismatic Source of Assurance and Salvation. "Guidance" can come only from a text that discloses "God's

92. Reinforcing the image of a Gnostic, bellicose Islam are the following sample passages from the Koran: "The unbelievers among the People of the Book and the pagans shall burn for ever in the fire of Hell. They are the vilest of all creatures." (98: 6-7, p. 430). "If only the unbelievers knew the day when they shall strive in vain to shield their faces and their backs from the fire of Hell; the day when none shall help them! It will overtake them unawares and stupefy them. They shall have no power to ward it off, nor shall they be reprieved." (21:39-40; pp. 229-230) "We will hurl Truth at Falsehood, until Truth shall triumph and Falsehood be no more. Woe shall befall you, for all the falsehoods you have uttered." (21:18; p. 228) "As for the unbelievers, it is the same whether or not you forewarn them; they will not have faith. God has set a seal upon their hearts and ears; their sight is dimmed and grievous punishment awaits them." (2:5-7; p. 11). "Therefore do not falter or sue for peace when you have gained the upper hand. God is on your side and will not grudge you the reward of your labors." (47:35-36; p. 359). "Believers, if you help God, God will help you and make you strong. But the unbelievers shall be consigned to perdition." (47:7-8; p. 357). "As for those who are slain in the cause of God, He will not allow their works to perish. He will vouchsafe them guidance and ennoble their state; He will admit them to the Paradise He has made known to them. (47:4-6; p. 357). "Let those who would exchange the life of this world for the hereafter, fight for the cause of God; whoever fights for the cause of God, whether he dies or triumphs, We shall richly reward him." (4:72-74; p. 68). All citations are from N.J. Dawood's translation of *The Koran* (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

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sight," i.e., how He views the universe.[93]

Yet, alongside the Gnostic pyrotechnics, there are key negative theological understandings that totally subvert the Gnostic elements. Foremost among these is the theological setting in which Muhammad reveals himself as a prophet. He disclaims any ability to perform miracles, and denies that it is integral to his prophetic mission.[94] Only the Koran as revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel is a miracle. No event recorded in the Koran claims miraculous status. Many chapters in the Koran begin with the words "Reflect . . . reflect." Muhammad defines his vocation in rational and naturalistic terms as to make mankind recall the original Revelations of the monotheistic God recorded in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.[95] Muhammad acknowledges belatedness as being constitutive of his revelational location. He is only coming to pick up the pieces after Judaism's and Christianity's failed attempts to re-form mankind in accordance with the requirements of the monotheistic God. Muhammad thus asserts distance twice over: Distance as inherent in the concept of the utterly transcendent monotheistic God; and the distance as a function of Muhammad's location in the chain of monotheistic Revelations. Distance in this second sense can even be seen as a ready-to-use metaphor for distance in the first sense.[96]

There are famous conceptualizations of God in the Koran that cohere with this preoccupation with distance. Its postulation of God's radical unity

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93. See the following passages: "This is the Paradise which the righteous have been promised. Therein shall flow rivers of water undefiled, and rivers of milk for ever fresh; rivers of wine delectable to those that drink it, and rivers of clarified honey. They shall eat therein of every fruit and receive forgiveness from their Lord. Is this like the lot of those who shall abide in Hell for ever, and drink scalding water which will tear their bowels?" (47:15; pp. 357-358). "Your religion is but one religion, and I am your only Lord. Therefore serve Me. Men have divided themselves into factions, but to us they shall all return." (21:92 93; p. 233). "On that day We shall roll up the heaven like a scroll of parchment. (21:103; p. 233). "When they are told: 'Follow what God has revealed,' they reply: 'We will follow what our fathers practised,' even though their fathers were senseless men lacking in guidance." (2:170; p. 26). "When they are told: 'Come to that which God has revealed, and to the Apostle," they reply: 'Sufficient for us is the faith we inherited from our fathers,' even though their fathers knew nothing and were not rightly guided." (5:104; p. 90). "The only true faith in God's sight is Islam." (3:19; p. 44). *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*, 29:50; p. 282: "They ask: 'Why have no signs been given him by his Lord?' Say: 'Signs are in the hands of God. My mission is only to give plain warning'.".

95. *Ibid.*, 2:137; p. 23: "We believe in God and that which is revealed to us; in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and to God we have surrendered ourselves'."

96. *Ibid.*, 112:1-4; p. 434: "Say: 'God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him.'"

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forms the organizing premise of negative theology.[97] If there is nothing to compare God to (if "None is equal to Him"), He is truly worthy of being God. But the price one pays for such incomparability is the denuding of literal content of all the verbs and adjectives applied to God. For example, if God knows and is powerful in the ways that human beings know and are powerful (except that He has greater knowledge and can assert more power than ordinary mortals), then his oneness and uniqueness have been breached. No matter how much His knowledge and power exceed one's own, He remains in the same comparative framework, thus eroding God's uniqueness. Only if one affirms an unabridgeable qualitative *caesura* between God and man can the prefix "mono" in the word "monotheism" be sustained. The price for acknowledging how the internal, immanentist logic of monotheism deconstructs itself is that it erases any charismatic source able to literally authorize all the directives that issue forth in the name of the monotheistic God. One has to scale down one's concept of the deliverances that monotheistic religion can support, and begin identifying surrogate mechanisms such as pluralism and consent that allow monotheistic religion to continue to function, despite the fact that it displaces itself even before it can get properly theoretically established.

The Koran does not flinch from embrace of such surrogate mechanisms.[98] If God literally cannot speak to His prophets, who must consent to regard the phenomenon that overtakes them as prophetic, rather than some kind of psychological aberration, before the event of prophecy can be said to occur, then there is no way to neutrally validate the content of one prophetic claim *vis-à-vis* the content of a conflicting or contradictory claim. On monotheistic grounds, one has to allow for diverse theoretical and institutional expressions of the monotheistic principle. The accommodation of pluralism at the end of the Koran echoes a statement formulated at the beginning: "There shall be no compulsion in religion."[99]

In the light of this discussion of the implications of monotheism, one is better able to appreciate the significance of the Prophet's disclaimer of miracles, and that only the Koran can be regarded as the sole miracle.

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97. *Ibid.*, 28-88; p. 278: "Invoke no other god with God. There is no god but Him. All things shall perish except Himself. His is the judgment, and to Him you shall return." And 3:18; p. 44: "God bears witness that there is no god but Him, and so do the angels and the sages. He is the Executor of Justice, the Only God, the Mighty, the Wise One."

98. *Ibid.*, 109:1-6; p. 433: "Say: Unbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I shall never worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship. You have your own religion, and I have mine."

99. *Ibid.*, 2:256; p. 38.

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Only a wholesale commitment to Islam — not a series of retail commitments occasioned by individual miracles — is possible. Coming later in the chain of monotheistic revelations than Judaism and Christianity, the Koran (Islamic Scriptures) constitutes an inter-textual gloss on its earlier counterparts. The Hebrew Scriptures consist of multiple commandments (*mitzvot*). The Christian Scriptures substitute a myriad of miracles for a myriad of commandments. The inter-textual gloss that the Islamic Scriptures cast upon these earlier Scriptures is that they both share the common vulnerability of engendering the illusion that a retail commitment to monotheistic religion is possible. The Koran shifts its emphasis very explicitly to wholesale commitment: Prostration and subordination before God overall. In this, the Koran tacitly takes its cue from the Jewish community's motto expressed in response to the revelation at Mount Sinai: *Na'aseh V'Nishmah*,[100] i.e., its wholesale commitment precedes its retail understanding. Analogously, in the case of Islam, one has to assent to the Prophet's presentation of his teaching in order for the teaching to achieve the efficacy that the Prophet intends for it. "Signs are in the hands of God." One is left only with naturalistic and rational devices for dealing with religious phenomena, as with all other phenomena. In the end, one could say that as a sub-text the Koran tacitly communicates how reason and revelation rest on the same irrationalist foundations. One has to be committed to the workings of reason in order to be bound by it, and one has to be committed to the workings of revelation in order to be bound by it. The non-negotiability of the monotheistic God requires the circumscription of the worlds (whether religious or secular) in which people choose to live. It is important to note that the "commitment to commitment" is as irrational as all other types of commitment, so that Islam, which makes subordination and prostration primary, is devoid of any privileged access to grace or salvation. It remains pluralistically situated in relation to its predecessors.

The Koran is rampantly contradictory. Gnosticism and negative theology seem to be forcefully embraced in different sections of the work. One clue for resolving this contradictoriness and attributing a consistent position to its author(s) might reside in the fact that the Koran affirms its own consistency in the context of emphasizing the radicalness of human freedom, suggesting that its authentic teaching is to be identified with the negative theological, rather than the Gnostic pole of the work. At 4:80 (p.

100. *Exodus* 24:7.

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69) the Koran says: "Whatever good befalls you, it is from God: and whatever ill from yourself." This seems almost like a recapitulation of the Augustinian response to Marcionite Gnosticism. Human freedom is unlimited, and one has only oneself to blame for evil in the world. It is in this anti-Gnostic context that the consistency of the Koran is affirmed at 4:82: "Will they not ponder on the Koran? If it had not come from God, they could surely have found in it many contradictions."

In light of all this, the Koran's construal of the *Akeidah* can be read along these lines, thus discrediting on Islamic grounds the implicit uses that Muslim terrorists have made of this story. In its summary of the events surrounding the *Akeidah*, the Koran says: "We gave him [Abraham] news of a gentle son. And when he reached the age when he could work with him, his father said to him: 'My son, I dreamt that I was sacrificing you. Tell me what you think.' He replied: 'Father, do as you are bidden. God willing, you shall find me steadfast.' And when they had both submitted to God's will, and Abraham had laid down his son prostrate upon his face, We called out to him, saying: 'Abraham, you have fulfilled your vision.' Thus do we reward the righteous."[101]

The text contains intimations that link it with Maimonides' and Rashi's reading. Abraham "fulfills" his "vision" when Isaac is lying "prostrate upon his face." Abraham's vision is fulfilled in his son remaining alive. The vision of the *Akeidah* does not extend to killing his son, but to discovering — articulating — the religious rules under which his son stays alive. Prostration before the monotheistic God does not in a straightforward, literal way establish a connection with Him, but is only an occasion for reconnecting with oneself, where in the heightened lucidity of a borderline, extreme moment one can try to hammer out what responsible living requires. The son's prostration before his father Abraham and before God in the *Akeidah* becomes an enduring symbol, even in the Koran, of the retrieval and reaffirmation of life.

101. *Ibid.*, 37:100-105; p. 315.

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Vanishing Worlds: On Dealing with What is Passing Away

David Gross

> What just was will probably soon be forgotten
> — Ernst Bloch

The surrounding world, which is often taken to be fixed or permanent, is of course ephemeral; in time it will fade away and disappear. Even within the span of one's lifetime, much, if not all, that can be located "in the present" will have to be located "in the past," where it will likely become increasingly remote and unavailable. In light of the fact that life is fleeting, it is important to ask this simple, but critical question: how should one deal with that which is slipping away? Many answers have been given on the personal level, but relatively few on the social-cultural level. Thus, there is a voluminous literature on the strategies available in facing the pain of loss resulting from the death of a loved one, or the hurt following the break-up of a marriage or a relationship, but there is no equivalent body of work that addresses the sense of loss stemming from the passing away of social-cultural realities.

To discuss evanescence on the historical as opposed to the personal plane, however, is no easy task, for the manner in which things slip out of sight and disappear has changed dramatically over time. In the premodern era, for instance, the pace by which man-made objects moved from the present into the past was so glacially slow that for most people the fading away of things was not much noticed. Once particular objects were created and introduced, they endured for decades or generations. If these

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objects became worn or dilapidated from use, they were repaired or refurbished, not discarded. As a consequence, the things one became familiar with as a child (chairs, tables, utensils, etc.) were usually still present and "in place" at the time of one's death. The world of material objects had durability; it was solid and reliable and objectively "there," which meant that it served as a dependable backdrop against which individuals could achieve some degree of stability or establish some sense of personal identity.[1] The same was true of values. The meanings and beliefs that one became acquainted with when first initiated into social life tended to be perceived as fixed and unchanging, a part of the universal order of things existing from time immemorial. Even when there was some danger that values might be eclipsed, powerful social and cultural forces were at work to ensure that this would not happen. Formally, there were numerous institutions, rites, and rituals designed to keep the central meanings and beliefs of the *habitus* alive and active in peoples' lives. Informally, there were countless traditions or folkways which, when taken altogether, had the effect of reinforcing the dominant system of values over the span of centuries. Hence, in pre-modern times there was no strong sense that things were slipping away, because in fact they were not, or rather the pace of evanescence was so protracted that for all practical purposes it was imperceptible. As a result, the things that mattered seemed not to be vanishing, but rather to be readily available as part of the very fabric of social life.

With the advent of modernity in the 16th and 17th centuries, these certainties and dependabilities could no longer be taken for granted, since now the speed of social change began to pick up, and almost everyone was aware of it. Relatively quickly, disruption rather than permanence became the essential experience for most people as the traditional *Lebenswelt* lost its integrative function under the impact of newly unleashed political, economic, and technological forces. Without a grounding in a firm and established life-world, filled with a rich stock of signs, symbols, memories, and meanings which everyone knew and shared, two consequences soon became evident.

First, the notion that a thing ought to be considered valuable simply because it had existed for a long time began to drop away. Consequently,

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1. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 136-38. For Arendt, "being related to the same chair and the same table" over a long period of time helps "stabiliz[e] human life." This stability in turn enables individuals to acquire a much-needed consistency of identity — something that, according to Arendt, would be hard to attain if one were not surrounded by enduring human objects.

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the pressure to keep up old things (one of the mainstays of traditional society) gradually gave way to a willingness to let them go once they had served their purpose. Along with the diminished perdurance of social objects there also emerged a fascination — even a bedazzlement — with the "new" in whatever form it might appear. Thanks to the advances of an increasingly efficient capitalist system, a plethora of freshly-manufactured objects (produced literally by the billions as "commodities") now began to inundate even the most hidden nooks and crannies of modern life. In comparison to these attractive new objects, the still-enduring old ones seemed to be embarrassingly out-of-date.[2] The modern view soon began to be: outworn objects can and ought to be discarded so that up-to-date ones can replace them. From this perspective, there developed not just a new awareness of the evanescence of things as a fundamental reality, but also an understanding that evanescence may be a *desideratum*, since it leads to a general clearing of the terrain, which in turn permits novel or unexpected things to burst forth into the light of day.

Second, and in part precisely because of the rapid departure of physical objects, there was also a fading away of once secure social relations, for with the disappearance of things as mediators between people, many of the old ties linking the individual to the larger community likewise lost their *raisons d'être.* The numerous duties, obligations, and protocols that had once regulated a myriad of social interactions through the sharing or utilization of objects rapidly dissolved in the wake of newly emerging economic and political realities that required entirely new sets of relations between people. As a result, old bonds, customs, and conventions that had formerly seemed entirely natural, perhaps even permanent, were replaced by others that had little or no historical precedent. In this regard, Marx was right: modernity did indeed "pitilessly [tear] asunder" earlier ways of being and relating, and it did "sweep away a wealth of fixed, fast-frozen relations with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions," while at the same time making new ones "antiquated before they [could] ossify."[3] But as previously fixed relations both between people and between people

2. The very term "out-of-date" makes its appearance at this time. The term would have had little meaning before the modern period. See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time,* tr. by Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 21-38 and 231-66; and Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64-91.

3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: International Publishers, 1993), pp. 11-12.

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and objects fell by the wayside, so too did many of the values based on the assumption of the validity and perdurance of those relations. Thus, a host of meanings, symbols, ideas, and ideals became superannuated, along with the relations upon which they were once firmly grounded. For the first time in history, it became clear to large numbers of people that values or meanings are not eternal and imperishable, but entirely transitory, since they fade and disappear like everything else in existence.

II

In the past few decades, the West has moved beyond modernity as such into *late modernity*, where the velocity of change (i.e., the pace by which the "new" is replaced by the "newer," and then again by the "newer still") has accelerated at a rate never seen before. There are two main reasons for the speeding-up of historical evanescence. The first has to do with the breakthroughs in both the market economy and technology in general, which have created a world of almost dizzying change and turnover. The second has to do with the precipitous decline in the effectiveness of once powerful countervailing institutions (e.g., churches, universities, civic organizations) which, in the past, had militated against a too rapid tempo of change in the social, economic, cultural, or political spheres of life. These institutions, with their deep investment in historical continuity, once held in check ideas or developments that appeared too novel, too experimental, or too heretical. But today matters are different: many or even most of these institutions have by now either become, like the churches, significantly marginalized and weakened, and hence no longer able to moderate those forces promoting full-throttle change regardless of the consequences; or, like the universities, they have largely given up their mnemonic function and "gone over" to the notion that change is, after all, a good thing — maybe even an end-in-itself — and therefore something that ought to be supported enthusiastically in every way possible both inside and outside of academia. The result of these two tendencies is that a vast amount of "stuff," most of it not that old, is either thrown into the proverbial dustbin of history, where it disappears from popular consciousness, or, if it is preserved at all, is maintained at the cost of being invested with an entirely new identity and status, namely that of being "non-contemporaneous."

With respect to the first of these two possibilities — the consignment of outworn things to the dustbin of history — the following is worth noting. In early modernity, it took at the very least two or three generations for an object, a value, or an idea to "become history," i.e., to

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be deemed irrelevant and then eventually to pass out of circulation. At that time there was a more or less predictable two-step process by which things moved from the present into the past, or from familiarity into obscurity: first, they slipped into what might be called the recent past (a temporal place where they were for all practical purposes "gone," but not yet so entirely absent that they could not be recovered through memory), and then in time they slipped into the distant past where, for most people, they were lost sight of altogether. Today, however, this transitional process has been radically speeded-up: the recent past has become nearly indistinguishable from the distant past, since things are now declared obsolete not in a matter of decades or centuries, but often in a matter of years, months, or even days.[4]

With regard to the second possibility — i.e., the preservation of outlived things on the condition that they be invested with a new identity — a different way of relating to the past is put into play. Here an object, an idea, or a value that has become obsolete due to the accelerated tempo of life is kept in circulation but treated as something non-contemporaneous. To be non-contemporaneous means to be from another time or "untimely." Something becomes untimely when it outlasts the increasingly compressed duration assigned to it by a fast-moving society, and hence comes to be viewed as superannuated and therefore passé. What one sees today is the production of ever larger quantities of non-contemporaneity, because not only objects or artifacts, but also meanings, symbols, and cultural values are now becoming out-moded at breathtaking speed.[5] Indeed, one can go further: there is not only a greater amount of non-contemporaneity being generated more quickly than ever before, but also a greater awareness in the general population that this process is occurring. As a consequence, the young as well as the old are now able to recognize how much of what was once considered a permanent fixture of social life has become merely a "cultural lag" from the past.

In light of this, it is important to return to the initial question: how should one deal with what is passing away (or with what remains present, but at the price of being treated as non-contemporaneous)? In answering this

4. In this regard, Guy Debord was not much off the mark when he declared, with reference to the unprecedented speed by which things now fall into obscurity, that "that which [our late-modern culture] ceases to speak of for three days no longer exists." See his *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* (Paris: Éditions Gerard Lebovici, 1988), p. 20.

5. See Hermann Lübbe, *Zeit-Verhältnisse: Zur Kulturphilosophie der Fortschritts* (Graz/Vienna/Cologne: Styria Verlag, 1983); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 25-26.

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question, the focus here will not be on material objects that are suffering depredation, but rather on particular "forms of life" or "forms of thought" that are slipping away at an ever more rapid clip, including habits of mind, ways of judging and valuing, systems of belief, modes of sharing or interacting, concepts of honor, moral or ethical suppositions, etc. The issue is how best to respond to the disappearance or shunting aside of these and other *Lebens-* or *Denkformen* that were once an essential part of everyday life. Should the response be one of regret or approbation? Should one lament or welcome the quickened pace of impermanency that is now taken for granted? How one answers this question determines to a large extent how one inhabits the world of late-modernity.

III

Generally speaking, there appear to be four ways in which to respond to historical evanescence. The first and arguably most prevalent response today is the one presciently described by Nietzsche more than a century ago: i.e., pushing what is already falling.[6] The main reason why this aggressive stance has won acceptance is that many people now believe that only by getting rid of the old can the new come into its own. The regulating assumption is the following: Because the new is almost by definition a *good in itself*, it needs to be encouraged and nourished. But so long as old attitudes, worldviews, or practices stemming from the past continue to be honored, such encouragement or nourishment is impossible. Thus, the antiquated or out-dated must be dispatched as quickly as possible so that the new can gain a foothold, which means that a virtual war needs to be waged against all remainders from previous but now surpassed ways of being, thinking, and experiencing. This first stance, then, is wholly unsentimental about what it takes to be the dead-weight of the past. Rather than grasp on to what is waning, it seeks to abolish this dead-weight in the name of either the best possibilities of the present (which deserve to be unfolded on their own terms) or the best possibilities of the future (which presumably exist *in nuce* in the present, but are able to make their full appearance only after there is first a massive clearing of débris).

This first view is well articulated by contemporary commentators such as Susan Deeds Ermarth or Keith Jenkins, whose thinking seems to

6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, part III, section 20; in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 321. "I say: what is falling we should still push. Everything today falls and decays . . . . [b]ut I — I even want to push it."

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reflect with great accuracy that prevailing in throw-away societies.[7] All societies, of course, throw things away, because they all have their own particular notions of what is useful (and therefore worth holding on to) or useless (and therefore happily dispensed with), but perhaps none before the present has had such a temporally foreshortened notion of what these two terms mean. Today, everything not absolutely in tune with the ruling modalities of late modernity is said to be either of questionable value or downright harmful, since it is assumed that whenever the non-contemporaneous dominates a person's life too completely (i.e., in the form of enervating habits, faithfulness to outworn ideals, or the like), one simply becomes "stuck in time," and thus hopelessly ossified and uncreative.[8]

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7. Susan Ermarth urges her readers to let go of the past and the residual traces of the past that have survived in the present, since neither is worth bothering about. What we ought to do instead is "take up a new kind of residence in time," which for her means to immerse oneself in immediacy and strive to find there particular "rhythms" that spring from the concreteness of our finite moments. In Ermarth's view, to cling to the past in any form would be to miss what is really before our eyes, namely, opportunities to experiment, to improvise, and to "play" with what is all around us. One's goal therefore ought to be to free oneself from the oppressiveness of what has gone before, and once this liberation is complete to merge, flow, and "swing with" the "interminable patterns without meaning" that can be found in the present, and the present alone. See Susan Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 14, 31, 45-51, 53, 211-14. Keith Jenkins has taken a position similar to Ermarth's. In *Rethinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1999), and several other writings, Jenkins strongly asserts that anything not "of" the present is for all practical purposes irrelevant. According to him, one does not need the past at all anymore, but rather a "radical emancipation from it" (including an emancipation from those survivals from the past that should have faded of their own accord, but for whatever reason have not done so). All that the contemporary individual requires for guidelines or directions can come entirely from what Jenkins calls the "rich imaginary" of the present, by which he means the "ample and agreeable" ideas propounded by Derrida, Rorty, Foucault, Baudrillard, Irrigaray, Kristeva, Lyotard, and Barthes, which, taken altogether, are so fruitful and far-ranging that they obviate the need to tap into any fund of ideas or values that antedate roughly 1960. Simply put, one is now so entirely post-historical that one can learn "nothing of obvious significance" from anyone or anything stemming from earlier times. What is broadly labeled "the past," contains nothing that requires loyalty, nothing to feel guilty about, no facts that have to be found, no truths to respect, no problems to solve, no projects to complete. One is entirely free to let go of what has gone before and to move on to explore completely "new ways of thinking and being." See Jenkins, *Why History? op. cit.*, pp. 2-3; also "Why Bother with the Past?" in *Rethinking History*, Vol. I, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), p. 56-66; and "'After' History," in *Rethinking History*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 7-20.

8. On the concept of "stuckness" see Robert J. Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), esp. 50-92; and David Gross, *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), pp. 66-68.

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For this reason, the advice coming from the advocates of this first response to historical evanescence is very simply to "de-memorize" the ideas, perceptions, and behaviors that have outlived themselves by bracketing and then forgetting everything from the past that seems to "get in the way" of present possibilities.[9] Here, the emphasis is on destroying what lingers on without warrant, but, as is almost always added, this destruction must be *creative*: it must be done with an eye to ushering in all that is fresh, and new, and waiting to be developed, not only in social or cultural life but in one's personal life as well.[10]

There can be little doubt that this first response contains much that is positive, for by pushing what is already falling, one often gains a sense of "release," a sense that one no longer need be straitjacketed by old frames or attitudes that delimit or oppress. But, while this response seems to promote liberation, one might ask: liberation for what? The brief answer, articulated by many present-day psychologists, is: in order to become a new kind of individual, one capable of embracing transience, living within the instabilities and insecurities of late modernity, and becoming as protean, improvisational, and multifaceted as possible in a world that has cut itself off from the unnecessary and unhelpful ballast of the past.[11] Yet, is this kind of existence really desirable? Could contemporary talk about the virtues of "playful nomadism" or the joys of being a "roaming non-identity" actually hide an emptiness and shallowness that one would perhaps rather not face up to? As Milan Kundera has pointed out, even though letting go of the past "causes man to be lighter than air, [and] to soar into the heights" — both apparently desirable qualities — it can also mean that one's life has very little real content, and that one's movements, though free, are nonetheless entirely insignificant.[12]

Similarly, the much vaunted richness and novelty of the present, supposedly obscured from view by the lingering persistence of the past, might be overstated. A good part of what is rich and interesting about the present,

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9. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Les dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois Editeur, 1980), p. 303.

10. On "creative destruction," a concept originally developed by Joseph Schumpeter, see Philip Fisher, *Still the* New *World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 71-75.

11. See, for example, Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); and Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989).

12. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, tr. by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 5.

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it ought to be acknowledged, is precisely that which survives from the past. If one inhabited a world filled with *only* what is contemporaneous, one would no doubt find it sterile and one-dimensional. In this respect, the late-modern urge to get rid of everything that is not completely synchronous with the present could, however inadvertently, be an urge toward nullity.

IV

A second way to respond to evanescence — one not espoused by many, and so mentioned only in passing here — is very nearly the reverse of the first. Instead of letting go of the past or attempting to erase it entirely, this option clasps on to exactly what is fading away or has just departed, and not only invests in it emotionally, but makes it the *locus of value* itself.

The assumption embedded in this position is that individuals need some foundation, some grounding to hold their lives together, since without something firm and dependable to rely on, everything falls apart and existence becomes little more than pure contingency.[13] In the past, people had long-standing continuities they could count on (traditions, customs, folkways) to give them the grounding they needed. Now, however, many if not most of these continuities have either atrophied or been dismantled, with the result that at least some people have come to feel that they have nothing substantial on which to anchor themselves except the vestiges of former continuities. Yet, as these same individuals see it, such vestiges, though themselves mostly discredited, provide the closest thing to something resembling a foundation. Thus, for those who endorse this second position, the point is not to dispense with non-contemporaneous residues and remainders, but to hold on to them all the more firmly, and to perpetuate them as long as possible, since they are all that remain. Needless to say, this worldview is extremely bleak, and unlikely to appeal in today's generally upbeat age.

On the whole, the strengths of the second response to evanescence lie, first, in the great sensitivity it shows toward what is passing away, though this sensitivity can sometimes slide over into excesses of nostalgia or sentimentality; and second, in the special importance it places in being *grounded in something*, even if, paradoxically, that something is fleeting and transient. To its credit, this response seems to recognize that the need for roots

13. In 1929, Walter Benjamin asked: "What form do you suppose a life would take that was determined at a decisive moment precisely by the street song last on everybody's lips?" The implied answer: a life of pure contingency. See Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, tr. by Edmund Jephcott, ed. by Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 182.

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is real, not something illusory, and certainly not, as Derrida has suggested, something that as a rule leads straight to fascism.[14] On the other side of the ledger, the shortcomings of the second response are perhaps more salient. For one thing, there is the danger that the evanescent will be idealized and fetishized, which could in turn induce one to become overly invested in it, even to the extent of making it a *sine qua non* of one's existence. For another, there is the risk that one might become not just concerned about, but pathologically obsessed with what is waning, for when so much from the past drops away, life may come to seem depleted or meaningless. As a result, one could easily fall into a depressive state, pining for what is already lost, or lamenting the immanent disappearance of what still remains. If something like this should happen, an individual could very well find himself unable to live in immediacy (as the first response insists one must do), but rather capable of living only belatedly, bound up in all essential matters either with what is receding or with what has already vanished.

In earlier times, when it seemed imperative to hold onto and cherish any and all survivals from the past, this second response would have made good sense. But today, when worldviews are more and more judged strictly by the psychological effects they are likely to produce, i.e., by the degree of either peace of mind or anguish they may bring, the drawbacks of the second response would surely be thought to outweigh its strengths, since the "tragic" outlook on life to which it almost unavoidably leads virtually guarantees unhappiness.

V

There is a third way to respond to what is waning, which only recently has received clear articulation. According to this option, both of the positions mentioned so far need to be rejected: the first, because it is too brutally dismissive of what is passing away, and the second, because it is too uncritically accepting of what has survived. A more credible position than either of these, or so it is claimed, is one which (1) accepts the truth of most of what has been said so far (i.e., that the present is slipping into the past at a more quickened pace than ever before, that this slippage

14. Jacques Derrida has linked the "terrifying desire for roots and common roots" to a basically fascist or totalitarian worldview. See Jacques Derrida, "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man's War," in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (Spring, 1988) p. 648. Simone Weil, by contrast, has argued more correctly that the desire for roots is wholesome and even "spiritual." "To be rooted," she wrote, "is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul." See Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, tr. by Arthur Wills (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1952), p. 43.

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cannot be slowed down, and that consequently the experience of evanescence is necessarily an experience of deprivation, since it implies the gradual loss of so many of the meanings, symbols, or practices that once seemed so comforting), but then (2) goes on to establish a more discriminating position regarding the numerous losses that unavoidably accompany late modernity. If, according to this third stance, what is departing is something "bad" (however this term is defined), then it is suggested that one ought not lament its passing, but speed up its dissolution by helping it disappear *still more rapidly* than it would through the normal processes of attrition. (On at least this one point, the third option is close to the first, since here too a loss could be perceived as a gain or liberation). But if what is departing is something "good" (and for the third response most of what is vanishing today would fit this description), then one should assume a completely different attitude toward it, i.e., an attitude not of affirmation, but of sadness or despondency. In this latter case, one would deeply regret the loss incurred or about to be incurred because of the profound sense of lack or diminishment it would bring in its wake: a sense that a hole has opened up in one's world which is unlikely ever to be repaired.

Broadly speaking, there seem to be two main ways to deal with the experience of loss. One would be to sink completely into it in such a fashion as to embrace (but also learn from) the feeling of vacuity that usually accompanies it, and the other would be to try to overcome loss in such a manner as to leave the sadness it produces far behind. To opt for the first would be to choose the *melancholic state*, which is very close to the previously mentioned second response. To opt for the second would be to enter into what might be called a *process of mourning*: a mode of relating to loss strongly defended by those who espouse the third response.

Freud also discussed these alternative ways of coping with loss. With respect to melancholia, Freud had little positive to say. For him, the melancholic option — characterized by an irrational attachment either to what is passing from the scene or to what has ceased to exist altogether, be it a person, an object, a value, or an ideal — produces not only inner impoverishment, but something "sick" or "pathological." Freud referred to the melancholic condition as a morbid, psychological disposition which leads, on the one hand, to an "abrogation of interest in the outside world," and, on the other, to an "inhibition of all activity."[15]

In contrast to melancholia, Freud considered mourning to be a far better

15. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, tr. by Joan Rivière, ed. by Ernest Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 153.

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way of coping with loss. Accordingly, when one chooses to mourn for rather than hold tightly to what is vanishing, one more appropriately lets go of what is fading away. By means of a grieving process that is an integral part of mourning, one begins to de-cathect from what is disappearing, and in so doing, to withdraw the emotional investment one had formerly placed in it. As a result, the person, object, or value at issue is, so to speak, neutralized. The power it once had is diffused, and it simply becomes a thing like any other, with no special charge or affect. But when a thing is diffused in this manner, its potentially debilitating spell is broken, and one is thereby released from an excessive involvement in what is vanishing or already gone. Furthermore, by being released in this fashion, one is also freed to "move on," i.e., to re-invest one's attention, commitments, or emotions in something else *in the present*. For Freud, this complicated process of mourning comes to an end only when one finally gives up, mentally and emotionally, the absent or soon-to-be absent person, object, or value to which one was previously bound.[16] One is then able not only to cathect with new things, but also to re-ground oneself in the immediacy of the present, thereby achieving a new equilibrium.

If one goes beyond the specifics of Freud's treatment of the depressive state in particular individuals, it becomes evident that there is something more broadly useful for the present discussion about his notion of grieving than first meets the eye, for by means of this mourning process one might be able to resolve problems that are not addressed very well by the other two modes of dealing with historical evanescence. For example, grieving appears to go further than the other two in helping one to come to terms with or "work through" the inevitable departure of surrounding objects and meanings. Likewise, grieving seems to represent the most mature of the three approaches in arriving at what is called *closure:* something that today is taken to be beneficial, because with closure comes the much-approved capacity to become, as Freud put it, "free and uninhibited again."[17] For these and similar reasons, this third response to evanescence — the response of grieving for, or mourning, what is passing — has been widely embraced, because in stressing the importance of a gentler, more sensitive mode of leave-taking than that to be found in, for instance, the first response, it fits so well the tenor of this therapeutic age. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, the choice of mourning should be seen as far more closely linked to the push-what-is-falling position than to the

16. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

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hold-on-at-all-costs one. The reason for this affinity is that both the first and third responses *privilege forgetting over remembering.* To be sure, the type of forgetting championed by mourning is gradual and highly respectful of what is departing, while that advocated by the push-what-is-falling approach is expeditious and entirely dismissive. Still, both responses strongly agree that "health" requires a letting go — a forgetting — since without some kind of severance from what is disappearing or already absent, one cannot affirm with vitality and enthusiasm the "new" that is calling out to be recognized.

VI

Finally, there is a fourth way to respond to evanescence, which seems to have received the least attention of all. Emerging out of what some might regard as an inadequate or failed process of mourning, this last response refuses to do precisely what mourning requires: it refuses to relinquish the things that are passing away. This refusal to let go allegedly leads (at least according to Freud) to a "morbid[ly] pathological" melancholia. But proponents of this fourth response to evanescence would disagree with Freud's negative assessment. They would say that holding on to what is being eclipsed is actually something positive, so long as (1) one's center of gravity remains more or less fixed in the present, which is exactly what does not happen in melancholia, where in an extreme manner one "goes over to" or becomes obsessed by that which is vanishing; and so long as (2) the way in which one stays in touch with what is slipping away is through the medium of memory.

Unlike the second or "holding on" response, this last response lets depart what is departing anyway. It has no interest in clinging to the noncontemporaneous or in trying to preserve intact what is disappearing. Instead, its primary concern is to keep the evanescent alive through the power of memory. Memory, then (which tellingly, in one of its earliest definitions meant the act of being "mindful of" or "abiding with" something after it disappears[18]), becomes the central element in this fourth response to the speeded-up impermanence of contemporary life. By means of memory, vanishing things are given a *mental* afterlife, which allows them to be sustained in the mind long after they have disappeared

18. See Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, tr. by F. D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 11 and 140; and J. Glenn Gray, "Heidegger on Remembering and Remembering Heidegger," in *Man and World*, Vol. X, No. 1 (1977), pp. 65-66.

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in reality. When memory assumes this kind of importance, the notion of closure can then no longer be regarded as desirable. In place of the "get over it!" attitude, which *au fond* requires a forgetting or a removal of something from consciousness, the new task would be the very different one of interiorizing what is waning in order to prolong *psychically* what cannot be prolonged *in actuality*.

But why try to preserve things "in memory"? The answer, the defenders of this fourth position would say, is because what is passing is absolutely unique and irreplaceable. Once it goes it will never come back again, and this fact ought to create a sense of obligation to bear witness to the existence of things that in a very short while will be no longer. To roughly paraphrase Walter Benjamin, one has a secret bond not just with what is past but with what is passing, and it is imperative that this bond is acknowledged and respected. One *owes* something to what is departing, and one can pay that debt only by keeping it in mind even after it is gone.[19] But, according to the advocates of this fourth position, there is yet another reason for remembering, this one having to do with the inherent value that may lie in what is perishing entirely apart from the simple fact of its transience. Many things that are vanishing possess an intrinsic worth that is not now noticed. As these things get discarded or consigned to the margins of social life, the deep meaning and value they may have once possessed largely disappears from view, if it is not obliterated altogether. Though there may be no reason to think that this process of devaluation can ever be stopped, it may be stalled by means of the holding action that is memory, or so the proponents of this standpoint hope. What remembering would entail is what Péguy called a "fidelity to fallen things"[20] — a fidelity that not only retains in consciousness the singularity and particularity of what is waning, but also lets departing things

19. This would presumably hold true even for those painful or hurtful things that are fading away. There would seem to be good reason to let them go, to forget them, since remembering would only allow open wounds to fester, rather than scar over. But, arguably, the horrendous things that are passing also need to be recalled, even if the result is an Hegelian Unhappy Consciousness, for what is not kept in mind could reappear and cause yet more damage the second time around. Benjamin was one who saw the need for this kind of Unhappy Consciousness, even though the price one had to pay for it (in terms of a likely loss of vivacity and good cheer on a personal level) might be quite high. See Martin Jay, "Against Consolation: Walter Benjamin and the Refusal to Mourn," in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 221-39.

20. Charles Péguy, cited in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 333.

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inform one's life without at the same time fetishizing them or turning them into *idées fixes*.

This last response has a great deal more merit than might appear to be the case. For one thing, to mentally hold on to what is disappearing produces what Olivier Mongrin has called "a different relation to time": one that may go a long way toward resisting the almost exclusive emphasis on the immediate, the instantaneous, and the up-to-date that characterizes so much of late-modern culture.[21] For another, to dwell in loss (without at the same time becoming incapacitated by it) helps engender a critical outlook on the world. Through memory, one becomes better able to "see what we are in light of what we are no longer."[22] Such a perspective gives one a reference point not otherwise obtainable, and from this point one can more accurately evaluate, and if necessary gain leverage against, the enticements as well as the shortcomings of what is wholly and flatly contemporaneous. (The same cannot be said of the option of mourning, for by ultimately de-cathecting from what is fading, the mourner gives up the very thing that could provide a critical *point d'appui* against the world as it is.) If there is any danger of being bewitched by the phantasmagoria of the present, memory can work to break the spell by demystifying what has been mystified. Indeed, it may be that memory, more than anything else, can make one aware not so much of the plenitude of contemporary life, but of some of its glaring deficiencies, and this awareness may help engender in at least some people a genuinely critical, as opposed to a merely passive view of the world.

Finally, to remain cognizant of what is slipping away may also help one achieve one's highest creative potential. To be sure, remembering what is fading might make one less able to notice the new, since one's primary attention would be directed not toward what is coming into being, but toward what is passing away. Yet, from another perspective, to retain in consciousness what is waning would broaden the range of what one can draw on in any kind of creative endeavor. Moreover, it may be that what lies at the heart of the creative impulse is not so much the desire to produce something "absolutely new," as Rimbaud maintained, but the drive to replace or reconstitute what is being lost. If so, then creativity would appear to depend on the memory of what is vanishing, for otherwise one

21. See Olivier Mongrin, "Une mémoire sans histoire? Vers une autre relation à l'histoire," in *Esprit* 190 (1993), pp. 102-13.

22. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," in *Representations* 26 (1989), p. 18.

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would have no clear notion of the nature of the disappearing things one needed to re-imagine and recompose in new contexts.[23]

VII

The four responses to evanescence just described represent the present field of possibilities. Each response has a rationale that appears convincing on its own terms, so long as one accepts the assumptions on which the response is based. Thus, if one agrees that what is perishing must for that reason be false, and that "[o]nly after what is false has fallen away can what is genuine live,"[24] then the first option of pushing what is falling would make the greatest sense. But if one believes that what is fading is of little worth, or that what worth it does possess is no longer germane to contemporary life, then the option of letting go, even if mournfully, would seem to be the most viable one. In contrast to these responses, however, and against the grain of what appears to be the dominant mood of late modernity, the option of holding on to what is vanishing has the most to recommend it. Yet, holding on would be best only if it were achieved by means of a "memory of the present" (Baudelaire) in which what is disappearing is preserved *inwardly*. It would not be a satisfactory response if it amounted to a frantic clinging to what is passing away in the vain hope that by doing so one could somehow *stop* the process by which forms of life and forms of thought ineluctably fade from the scene. Today one may be too quick in declaring worthless all that is not immediately useful, for what might seem irrelevant or valueless in a narrowly pragmatic sense may be highly relevant and valuable in a broader one. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, those who keep in mind what is departing may have more resources available to them, and therefore be better positioned to live critically and creatively in the present, than those who dismiss or simply forget what is slipping away in order to remain more fully in tune with the present fast-paced age.

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23. Linking creativity to loss in this manner would seem to imply that creativity is, by its very nature, tinged with sadness. Julia Kristeva appears to accept that this is the case, for in her view it is sadness above all that "trigger[s] the imagination." See Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholy*, tr. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 9. Peter Homans has made a similar point, arguing that "the capacity to be depressed" is a powerful goad to creativity. See Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 338.

24. Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, tr. by Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 238.

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Technology and Destiny[1]

Claude Karnoouh

Can anything stop technology? Progressives and traditionalists alike avoid this question by relying on alternative versions of humanism: the abstraction of human rights for the former; the security offered by fatherland for the latter. Both resort to slogans. The former seek to mask the failure of democracy, i.e., the end of politics; the latter wish to bask in the illusion of a glorious past concealing the brutal prehistory of the modern. Is it too late to reverse the direction of this out-of-control Western trend? Nietzsche already warned about the need to "master the instincts of knowledge," about the need to avoid succumbing to the impact of science on civilization.[2] This state of affairs leads anyone blessed with simple common sense to pessimism. The seductive cultural images of the apologists of technology conceal something terrifying. Presented in a much more sophisticated manner than the old totalitarian propaganda, the hedonistic character of these images makes them all the more revolting.[3]

Today, all meaning is exhausted in a commodified culture. After the fall of the Soviet Empire, when political instability could have paved the way for something more than a frantic celebration of Western consumer goods, it has become clear the extent to which people are susceptible to voluntary servitude. All that came out of Eastern Europe was an enthusiastic

1. Translated from the French by Julia Kostova.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Das Philosophenbuch/ Le Livre de Philosophie*, tr. by Angele K. Marietti (Aubier-Flammarion, 1969), §37, p. 53.

3. The "Cité des Sciences" in the Villette in Paris provides an excellent example. It makes ignorant visitors believe that it is enough to observe complex experiments or to touch technological objects to understand them ludistically, along with the theories of physics or chemistry that make them possible. If it were so easy, if observing and touching were enough, why bother to train scientists at all?

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demand for a bunch of gadgets, provided they were electronic. The slaves of communist ideology had already been prepared. The only difference today is between those who had already learned how to steal from the public, and those who thought that, miraculously, they would gain access to the abundance generated by Western capitalism. What happened was a radicalization of the capitalist empire. The West legitimated itself with promises to bring about these miracles. A syncretic economy emerged out of the black market, under the auspices of Western capitalism — the IMF, the World Bank, the EBRD [European Bank of Reconstruction and Development], etc. National and international financial institutions became integrated, and the old communist elites turned into mafia networks engaged not only in opening new markets but, first and foremost, in stealing public property the fastest way possible.[4] The transition to democracy was confused with the highjacking of public property — clearly, the century's biggest heist — which engendered anarchy and a generalized political corruption within former Soviet countries, now new Western protectorates.

Crisis as a Precondition for the Progress of Modernity

Since Heidegger's account of the history of philosophy as the "forgetting of Being," it has become clear that this technology is rooted in the ontological foundations of modern metaphysics — the one deployed by Descartes with the certainty of his *ego cogitans*, and sure to be able to grasp truth by means of its mathematical charts.[5] According to Nietzsche, this is how nihilism came about. This metaphysics implies a philosophy in which man becomes the center of the world, and his activities are justified by their practical effects. Proud of his achievements, man eventually becomes convinced that he is the only *demiurge*, that he can do anything, that scientific knowledge will lead to the discovery of all of nature's secrets — even about himself — and that he will be able to express them as "natural" laws couched in logical and mathematical terms. Thus, Descartes laid the foundation for Galileo's discoveries: because of the subject's certainty of the logical and mathematical configuration of its object, the truth of its effects could be universalized. With Descartes, Western knowledge began to unfold as modernity.

In mythology, the purpose of knowledge was to see man and the

4. Michel Chossudovski, "Dismantling Former Yugoslavia. Recolonizing Bosnia," in *Courant alternatif* (November 1999).

5. Gerard Granel, "Les années trente sont devant nous," in *Etudes* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), pp. 67-89.

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world in harmony with the gods; philosophy, however, distances man from his animal traits and allows him to contemplate his own pure ideas or the logic of his arguments, reducing these practices to insignificance in the name of the ideal: Plato, in the name of the *idea*; Aristotle, in the name of *energeia* and of a grammatical logic of the Greek language axiomatized as a universal logic.[6] Under a unique and triune God, knowledge subjects the imperfection of human acts to a divine order that has become the world's *a priori* (St.Thomas and the four spheres, which form the perfect world).[7] No practical innovation could reassure the subject in the quest for perfection that his freedom is limited by a transcendent power.[8]

With Galileo's and Descartes' insights (the *Dasein* of the essence of technology),[9] knowledge became a machine that constantly questions the validity of immediate perception. The object of conceptualization, subjected to empirical proof achievable by means of instruments,[10] is to deny the truth of the senses — the direct existential experience of the world — and to seek the truth of a new world totally external to the subject.[11] Thus, Descartes formulated his famous proposition, which became the foundation of modern metaphysics: "We will become the masters and owners of nature."[12] It should come as no surprise that science has forgotten its origin, because, after Heidegger, it is obvious that "science does not think."

6. Emile Benveniste, "Categories de pensées, categories de langue," in *Les Etudes Philosophique*, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1958).

7. St. Thomas Aquinas, "De Regno" in *Sancti Thomas de Aquino Opera omnia*, Vol. 42 (Rome: 1979), pp. 417-471, tr. by Denis Sureau in *Petite somme politique* (Paris: 1997).

8. Jean Gimpel, *La Revolution Industrielle au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1975). See also the problems of usury, of the price of money, which led all major scholastic thinkers to theorize about just remuneration. See Jacques Le Goff, *La Bourse ou la vie* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), pp. 27-32.

9. To an extent, Descartes is the heir of Bacon's "practical philosophy" and of medieval thinkers who desacralized nature in the attempt to reconcile reason and faith. Thierry de Chartres, who died around 1155, wrote: "It is not possible to understand genesis without the intellectual formation of quadrivium, i.e., without mathematics, because mathematics provides the rational explanation of the Universe," quoted by Gimpel, "La revolution industrielle," in A. C. Crombie, *Histoire des sciences de Saint Augustin a Galilee* (Paris: P. U. F., 1959), Vol.1, p. 25.

10. Descartes, *Regulae*, Rule VII, tr. by Jean Sirven (Paris: Vrin, 1970), pp. 51-52. This argument is also explored by Paolo Rossi, *Les Philosophes et les machines 1400-1700* (Paris: P. U. F., 1996), p. 108. The method "resembles those of the mechanical arts, which do not need the help of others, but provide the means to produce their own instruments."

11. By appealing to the mechanical arts, Descartes feeds the hope to invent an "infinity of artifices which allow for painless enjoyment of the fruits of the earth and all other commodities." See Rossi, *Les philosophes et les machines*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

12. Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, tr. by John Veitch (LaSalle, IL: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1945), p. 66.

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Precisely because it does not think about its origins, science can undertake an endless quest for knowledge.

When all is said and done, even God no longer hold his place. The proof of his truth, previously grasped through revelation, now must be *demonstrated* through logical arguments. Thus, God becomes a kind of remote *Deus ex machina*, leaving to man the problem of discovering the physical laws of nature. Thus, in view of the "enigmas" of nature, the sacred disappeared from everyday experience. What was once the foundation of faith, i.e., revelation, what early Christians called "miracles" (or Tertullian's dictum: "I believe, because it is absurd") cannot be justified with this way of thinking. So conceived, scientific knowledge (Foucault's will to know, Vattimo's homologation, which are other names for technology) can be evaluated only in terms of its effects, because it develops self-referentially from its own interpretative certainty and the tangible results it produces. Those who suggest that scientific knowledge could be good or bad show that they have understood nothing of its conceptual and practical dynamics, and that they belong to two specifically European types: those longing for the Golden Age and Paradise Lost, who mourn the Fall;[13] and incorrigible Enlightenment optimists who advertise various versions of a bright future under different names (progress, reason, the world spirit, communism, the end of necessity, democracy, human rights, the achievements of market society). From Descartes to Hayek, modern Western thought has always sought to eliminate all obstacles to a radiant future.[14]

In fact, scientific knowledge and its practical results are always somewhat ambiguous. For life, government, and the various ways of organizing communal life (i.e., what is called politics, modes of socialization, customs, laws, economic exchange, modes of production, etc. — what constitutes a community), science is both good and bad. To the extent that phenomena embodying technology and scientific knowledge produce ambiguous results, modernity is in a permanent state of crisis, which the masters of knowledge and power need to deal with constantly. Created by knowledge, power over people is driven forward by the logic of scientific

13. Here, the best example would be Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, where the West does not live in decadence, but rather in a triumphant accomplishment.

14. This is the objective of the major works in the history of thought of Western modernity. For preliminary deconstructions, see Martin Heidegger, *Beitrage zur Philosophie, Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: 1989), and Reiner Schürmann, *Des hegemonies brisées* (Mauvezin: T.E.R., 1996), Vol. II, Part 3, Ch. II, "Des double prescriptions sans nom commun (Heidegger)."

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progress, which engenders a permanent state of crisis. This is why history teaches nothing. As Marc Bloch wrote in 1940: "People are always closer to their time than to their fathers." Crises are also due to the contradictory conditions of a reconstituted present. This means that they cannot be overcome merely by decisions, which engage the future and cause other crises — an acceleration of progress *ad infinitum*. It is as if people, first scientists, then ordinary consumers, were hypnotized, always enthusiastic and blinded by the technological exploits of scientific knowledge. It never, or almost never, occurs to them that tomorrow may not be bright, since no transcendence could reestablish order or limit their freedom of knowledge, which ultimately is unlimited power. Because of the anonymity of a definite and enigmatic presence, they are fascinated by the most immediate and ephemeral present in the name of a bright future. Crises of modernity occur when it is time to apply new political and economic theories, which transform modes of production, consumption, exchange, construction, and destruction that science had prefigured as possibilities. Crises are signals warning about rising new forces.

What characterizes modern revolutions is that they seek to speed up the development of modernity. They always seek to uproot people further, to destroy what scientific knowledge considers outdated, doomed to the "trashcan of history." By promising a "future happiness," modernity justifies the destruction of parts of life it has helped build. As soon as there is some stability, when there are apparent improvements in everyday life, the price of the immense destruction that has produced them is forgotten. This amnesia allows humanists to claim that tomorrow will never be that way again. Also, those who have used scientific knowledge for evil purposes are condemned retroactively, with the present exonerated of all potential consequences. These are naïve or cynical visions, which rule out evil as a possible outcome of today's deployment of techno-science. A new cycle may thus begin out of various possibilities, some of them more violent than others, whose actors, paradoxically, pretend to disconnect themselves morally, feeding the most captivating anachronistic illusions. Those who plead for soft forms of development (and there are many) only obscure this abysmal problem. They cannot suggest the possibility of soft development except by capitalizing on their knowledge, i.e., by inventing new products that will eventually be transformed into commodities. By so acting, they pave the way for an "extension of the domain of the struggle,"[15] if by

15. This is the title of Michel Houellebecq's first novel, which offers a captivating metaphor for the last decade of the 20th century.

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struggle one understands the frantic competition necessary to the machinery that unites capital, scientific research, and the market. Thus, those "good" producers, those "good" bio-agricultural merchants, cannot avoid technological development, even if they wanted to give it the taste of organic honey. A new expression has been coined in all seriousness: "to make agriculture and traditional food with modern means." A civilization of leisure — a postmodern form of the commodification of free time — demonstrates that the commodification of earlier domains has remained under the spell of what Heidegger called the *Gestell* (the recasting everything in terms of a generalized framework) typical of the very essence of technology. The development of agriculture, of nutritional supplements, and of distribution systems based on an industrial logic, and the rationalization of the production process in order to maximize profits engenders struggles ever more radical to stem the tendential falling rate of profit. This crisis — both biological (contaminated blood, mad cow disease, chicken laced with dioxin) and economic (unemployment, and the ruin of industrial farms created through technological means as well as trade-union and agricultural policies) — demonstrates the resistance of life to what is fundamentally foreign to it, i.e., techno-industrial and logico-scientific constraints. How could one think that the so-called "organic agriculture" could escape the limitations imposed by profitability, without which modernity would be condemned to economic stagnation, i.e., death?

Endless Growth

Nowadays, some professional groups, consumer associations, and intellectuals are concerned, belatedly,[16] with all the chemical and genetic manipulations used to modify plants and animals in order to improve output. Of course, eugenics is one of the most ancient human adventures. Having left behind the hazards of hunting and gathering, and having settled down and built villages and towns, people developed the cultivation of plants (agriculture) and the domestication of animals (breeding). These two phenomena correspond to the first and oldest urban revolution. The

16. There is something suspicious about the late appearance of this opposition. How is it that pure souls who pretend to belong to the critical elite took so long to notice, in the 1970s, the rapid growth of the French food industry, which became the most powerful in the European Union? Were they afraid to be non-conformists and anti-modern? Did they not dare to put forth a politically incorrect critique? Could their careers have been damaged? Do they not play today, once again, a role that has become classical within mass democracies: to figure out which criticisms are authorized by the powers-that-be, and, when all is said and done, to put forth a spectacular simulacrum that threatens no one?

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selection of vegetable and animal species remained subject to the hazards of natural cross-fertilizations, which explains the slow evolution of domesticated animals. What was selected was what nature already offered, but took a long time to accomplish. It was a matter of reinforcing some already present traits. As far as artificial insemination is concerned, it is only a way to improve this old natural process. The major techno-scientific innovation of the second half of 20th century, made possible by the discovery of the structure of DNA in 1953[17] and the elucidation of the genetic code in the 1960s, was the decoding of the first human chromosome, which created the possibility of modifying and redistributing the genetic patrimony of all species for good or bad. From then on, it was easy to create new species *ex abrupto*, which upsets the biological time of evolution (as Darwin interpreted it) and forces nature without controlling possible and inevitable reactions. Despite all progressive writings, all ethical commissions, and all laws[18] meant to anaesthetize people, such a demiurgical will to know is not driven by the goal to improve the state of mankind, but rather by the logic of innovative knowledge.[19]

Given the present state of knowledge and technological means available to the most powerful nations, the earth is now capable of feeding all its inhabitants and many more. But the genetic innovations of agricultural research and embriology, which are funded by powerful industrial and financial groups, are promoted not by the spirit of good government, but by the logic of profit. Once again, this shows the relation between science, technology, and capital. Like all commodities, intellectual commodities will also be the objects of struggle.[20] In a nutshell, it is a new mode and a new stage of war. Bill Clinton was not mistaken when, in his annual

17. James D. Watson, *La Double helice* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1968).

18. See Jean-Yves Nau's article on authorized research on human embryos, "De nouvelles perspectives therapeutiques et de lourdes questions ethiques," in *Le Monde* (December 1, 1999): "How could one imagine that a scientific activity *de facto* prohibited by the 1994 laws concerning bioethics could, five years later, be authorized by those in charge of defining an acceptable national consensus?"

19. On the contrary, the enormous amounts spent in Western hospitals on biologically assisted births or on the placement of embryos in the uterus of surrogate mothers could be devoted to improving the life of several hundred thousand men, women, and children who are victims of long-known diseases like leprosy, malaria, and tuberculosis.

20. As the French Minister of Research (who is also the Minister of Education) has stated emphatically: "The commerce of this virtual commodity already takes place on a global scale, without borders and, for the time being, without any clear controls. An intangible commodity, which can be transferred only from mind to mind, is transported easily from one end of the planet to the other at market costs, prices, and values." Alaude Allegre, "Le Commerce mondalisé de l'esprit," in *Le Monde* (December 18, 1999).

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address to the US Academy of Sciences, he reminded an audience including his country's most important scientists that they should be ready to face new conflicts, a new terrorism, new threats: "I said terrorist and outlaw states are extending the world's fields of battle, from physical space to cyberspace, from our earth's vast bodies of water to the complex workings of our own human bodies."[21] In fact, it is possible to foresee new types of struggles, new types of fighters: Internet hackers or researchers engendered by this development of techno-power, which is no longer a quest for new land or new maritime spaces, but for information programs and counter-programs, for the molecular gestation of enzymes, bacteria, and viruses.

Reactions to the dangers of genetic-engineering, exemplified by the interest in organic food — the "return to the products of the soil" — have nothing to do with a return to local exchanges. The West European countryside is deserted; its inhabitants are now suburbanites, super-specialized farmers, or owners of second residences, who are inextricably tied to local, national, and international markets. Organic agriculture works like the transformation of the most ordinary objects of the old countryside into "antiques": furniture for second residences, i.e., like a commodity. The "return to the products of the soil" — which means reduced productivity, less mechanization, less use of fertilizers — costs more and is targeted for a privileged clientele. Furthermore, it is only partially organic, because the farmer cannot control the quality of the air or the water. Organic agriculture, or what pretends to be such, is part of a world movement, which, once again, separates wealth and poverty. Nothing integrated into the laws of the market ever escapes these dynamics. The revolt against the impact of technology cannot unfold independently of the general forces created by the production requirements of techno-science. This is the paradox of post-modernity: if today producers of traditional French cheeses such as Roquefort live comfortably, it is because they depend on the American market to buy more than 40% of their production.

These examples show how the solution to this endless proliferation of crises is always sought in the new and the extension of the given. In the arguments and insults hurled by justifiably angry farmers at meetings with McDonalds, it is easy to recognize alarming economic dysfunctions and serious social fractures. The crisis, which eventually boils down to unemployment, misery, beggary, and the uprooting of masses of people has become the obsessive fear of Westerners, who have tasted the delicacies

21. William J. Clinton, in *Proceeding of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 96, No. 7 (Washington, DC: 1999), pp. 3486-3488.

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of consumer society and have associated it with the democratic ideal. In the West, collective consciousness is haunted not by the lack of essentials, but by the lack of non-essentials, which are offered to everyone through that economic propaganda known as publicity.

After a century of Enlightenment teaching correlating scientific progress with moral progress, people in the West have been subjected to two different forms of the same servitude: on the one hand, to work and to its inevitable by-product, unemployment; on the other, to commodities and their by-product, credit.[22] This is why they are always ready to accept whatever political and social solutions, even the most authoritarian, dictatorial, even barbaric, as long as abundance and security are guaranteed: work, consumer goods, holidays, leisure, etc. These choices have radicalized the contradictions between conflicting interests, thus generating tension within empires and nation-states, which have plunged these people into total war, and produced the human disasters typical of the 20th century.

It should not be forgotten that war is a function of techno-economic progress. Despite all the evidence, humanists still refuse to admit it. They argue that only totalitarian regimes misuse science and technology. They act as if, since the Enlightenment, an ethical imperative dominates political systems as well as institutional and legislative tools, which requires the peaceful settlement of conflicts. But war is a formidable instrument of production and techno-scientific innovation.[23] It is not only a violent confrontation between peoples (war being as old as their presence on earth); since the invention of artillery, it also has been part of the endless process of scientific invention. It is a pawn of power, because it is committed to the creation of more effective means of killing, of destroying what took centuries to build. This scientificity of war has erased ancient notions of courage and bravery and replaced them with industrial concepts that promote an ever-growing need for new arms, new munitions, new buildings better able to resist gunfire, etc., i.e., a programmatic

22. Frederick F. Clairmont, "Ces firmes géantes qui se jouent des Etats," in *Le Monde diplomatique* (December 1999). ". . . the fantastic sums which float around the stock market and arouse the appetite of gigantic predators come from debt. The total world debt (households, enterprises and governments) has increased from $ 33,100 to $ 37,000 billion between 1997 and 1999. Whether it is an exponential growth of 6.2 %, or triple that of the world PIB, it is a gigantic volcano threatening to erupt any moment."

23. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1994). In Ch. 1, the author provides figures concerning the extraordinary explosion of industrial production brought about by WWI. Hannah Arendt also reaches the same conclusion in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958).

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calculus.[24] Today, the power of mobilized human masses has been substituted by the production of "intelligent" weapons and of more sophisticated tools in general. This implies new needs, new management, and a multitude of ever more rationalized means of transportation. It also implies an unprecedented progress in medicine, surgery, psychiatry, etc.[25] War constantly innovates,[26] and within this process of mass destruction there are even more gigantic plans for reconstruction. War (or its preparation, as in the case of the Cold War, which lasted 45 years) has become a decisive factor in the deployment of techno-science and capital. In other words, war requires a rationalization similar to that involved in the most complex kinds of industrial production. To consider war the result of a degenerated use of science or as some kind of social pathology, as humanist philistines do, is metaphysical tomfoolery. When all is said and done, it is an escape without any consideration of reality, as if the latter was nothing but another illusion. As for "realist" strategists, they proclaim the end of metaphysics. Consider the following, written in 1961 by Herman Kahn, an American expert on nuclear war: "Objective examinations show that human tragedies (*sic*) would enormously increase in the world [after nuclear war] but that this increase would not exclude normal and happy existence for the

24. It could be argue that the introduction of firearms at the time of the birth of big industry, made the army the place to apply corporal punishment in order to achieve a better performance of the human machine in the battlefield. See Jacques-Antoine-Hypolyte de Guibert, *Essai general de Tactique precede d'un Discours prelimentaire sur l'Etat actuel de la Politique et de la Science militaire en Europe* (London: 1772), Vols. I and II. This work, strangely forgotten today, anticipates the concept of war economy envisaged by Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (Bonn: Dumlers Verlag, 1952); Roger Caillois, *Bellone ou la pente de la guerre* (Brussels: Le Renaissance du Livre, 1963), part I, Ch. III, "Armes a feu, infanterie, democratie" and Part II, Ch. III, "La guerre totale"; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution. Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Ch. 1. For an extensive discussion on the relation between political and economic powers, see Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), Part 3 "Discipline," Chapter I, "Les Corps dociles." See also Caillois, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-231: "Belligerance develops first as a rivalry between inventors, educational institutions and laboratories. A whole new army, monstrously powerful, must be mass produced, one that necessitates abundant and qualified man-power, natural resources . . ., a developed industrial mobilization, and modern and expensive tools."

25. All surgeons agree that WWI and the industrial nature of the battles have stimulated unprecedented progress in trauma surgery and prosthesis. Psychological treatment of personality disorders resulting from industrial or natural catastrophes, terrorism or transportation accidents, was developed only after the American war in Vietnam.

26. Parker, *The Military Revolution*, *op. cit.*, Ch. 1. The conquest of space and communications by means of satellites was made possible by Werner von Braun, a German expert who designed the V-I and V-2 for the Nazi regime and was brought to the US in 1945 to help in the power-struggle against the ex-USSR, as well as some Soviet scientists.

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majority of the survivors and their descendents. The embryonic deaths would not have but relative importance . . . . It is probable that, in the first generation, there would be around five million of these cases and about a hundred million in the next generations. I consider this last figure as not weighing too much in the balance . . . . Nonetheless, humanity is so fecund that even a small diminution of its fertility is not a reason to be taken particularly seriously, not even by the individual affected."[27]

In order to develop with the capital investment it needs, techno-science requires, under pain of stagnation (and therefore death), forgetting and denying truths established in the course of its own history, i.e., the very foundations of its own possibility, the successive stages leading to the achievement of its truth, as well as all the ethical values that pretend to limit its effects. There can be no quantum or wave mechanics without putting aside Newtonian mechanics; no molecular biology without abandoning previous typologies; no capital expansion without the obsolescence of still operational objects. In other words, there cannot be techno-economic progress without the anticipated destruction of use value and the domination of an operational value constantly renewed and transformed into exchange value. In modernity, it is always supply (generated by the alliance of techno-science and capital), that determines demand, and not the other way around. Because of this ontological nihilism — Nietzsche's transvaluation of values — the technological embodiments of science always turn out to be ambiguous: both positive and negative, destructive or supportive of life, promising the kind of inhuman immortality hitherto reserved for God.

The frantic quest for infinite knowledge seeks to reveal the ultimate secrets of nature (including man), in order to substitute it with artifacts (clones). Within the context of what is already technically possible, social reality could be organized into different genetically predefined groups. Each one would be concerned with fulfilling the programs set by the masters of economic knowledge and power.[28] Each group would be subjected to regulations and assisted by brain implants connected to computers able

27. See Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 133ff. If this reasoning is applied in evaluating the human costs of the 1920-21 Civil War in Soviet Russia, and then to the subsequent collectivization and repression, it follows that all of this has not had a major impact on society!

28. See "Les pratiques de la National Security Agency," in *The Washington Post*, translated in the *Courrier international*, No. 474 (December 2-8, 1999). It has to do with the project *Echelon*, i.e., the ensemble of powerful computers able to process millions of messages (e-mails, faxes, phone conversations) transmitted through ultra-short waves and satellite channels, by tracking key-words.

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to detect even the smallest deviations from the norm, under the vigilant eyes of video cameras and other computers constantly spying on telephone transmissions and whatever travels through the Internet. Are not the most advanced research programs in the US seeking to connect human brains to computers? "A completely paralyzed man can use a computer only through the power of his thought. Thanks to cerebral implants, 21st century man could increase his natural capacities, understand languages he had never learned, instantaneously mobilize vast sources of information, and no longer see the difference between his own body and his 'external' organs."[29] This would be an absolute form of *extasis*, of human identification with what is totally external, even though this exteriority is the product of man's imagination. It would be the complete triumph of the *Gestell*. The results of this research seem as promising as its director, the American neurologist Philip Kennedy, is wobbly: "The medical applications of our research are immense, but I prefer not to think about them, because I am a little scared."[30] Others are already rejoicing: "Electronics would increase the power of the brain much like the hammer has increased the power of the arm."[31] But they forget to note that these electronic implants "create, to different degrees, new problems with respect to privacy and the confidentiality of personal data. It seems as if permanent virtual communities are about to emerge, whose members would receive and emit huge amounts of private data to be duplicated and spread everywhere."[32] Simpletons dream of more freedom: "We cannot wait to hear the noise of the drill going through our skulls to install electronic devices."[33] They are prisoners of a prison with no bars, set up by biology, cybernetics, and the virtuality of the great network of global information. This is the program of an implacable fate: the elementary particles of an anthropologically renewed society.[34]

Nostalgic versions of the irenic challenges of techno-science, violent socio-political revolutions, whatever they are called — all the desires for

29. Yves Eudes, "Des surhommes au bac d'essai," in *Le Monde* (December 5-6, 1999).
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.* This situation is illustrated by the 1999 film *The Matrix* by the Brothers Wadrowski.
33. *Ibid.*, "Encyclopedie Cyberpunk."
34. See Michel Houellebecq's novel, *The Elementary Particles*, tr. by Frank Wynne (New York: Knopf, 2001), which vehemently denounces this future. The same idea is expressed less forcefully by Jean Baudrillard in *L'echange impossible*, *op. cit.*, and by Peter Sloterdijk in "Le Parc humain," in *Le monde des débats* (October 1999), and in *Essai d'intoxication volontaire* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1999).

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social or technological transformations at the heart of modernity — cannot break free from their essence. They have always ended up intensifying this same modernity and extending it over spheres of human activities that still escape its grip. All modern revolutions have appealed to progress: to a rationalization better than the previous one, a more efficient administration, an intensification of production. At the same time, they have concealed their objectives under the cloak of old mythologies, under the typical "values" of humanist European culture, or those of a redeeming proletariat advancing the heritage of humanity. In discussing Marx, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, Hannah Arendt noted that their radical critique of idealism does not escape the very idealism they denounce. Were those three philosophers seen as the "pre-Socratics" of late modernity, the limitations of their revolutionary thought would be betrayed by the conceptual tools they employ. The same goes for the practical matters of socio-political revolutions, when they always prefigure the same project: to realize more efficiently and more generally what has already been done. Intoxicated by their achievements and having forgotten their metaphysical essence and all of their "perennial values," the natural sciences are not embarrassed by all this. They accept uncritically their truth concerning the present and the future. They simply say "tomorrow will be better than today only because today is better than yesterday." Since the subject has settled in the self-centered certainty of quantifiable objectifications, no version of humanism could ever rise to confront this machinery.

Thus, it is impossible to change the fate of modernity in the most radical sense, because the self-referentiality of its potentials self-transcendence has not been exhausted. Changing the orientation of modernity requires finding not only another meaning for "revolution," but a collective will which would welcome it without transforming it into a new radicalization of its previous potentials.

From the Stationary State to Perfect Exploitation

The idea of a new revolution can be prefigured without clearly defining its shape. This intuition remains enigmatic, even though the initial objective is to move against metaphysics, or, rather, to make an effort to break *free* of modern metaphysics, of this subjective certainty (the *adequatio res intelectum*), proclaiming man to be the master of objects and himself. This arrogance is best exemplified by Kant: "Give me matter and I will build with it a world, i.e., give me matter and I will show you how the world should turn out." This arrogance, which pretends to dominate the whole

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world in order to uncover its secrets, has gradually resulted in forgetting the metaphysical origin of science in favor of the efficiency of theories and their experimental verifications.[35] It confounds all natural phenomena (natural sciences), then all related human activities (economics), then even man himself in his social and private experiences (sociology, psychology), with unified representations, which allow quantification and manipulation.

"To transcend metaphysics" — this is what Jünger meant when he talked about "transcendence": *über*[36] *die lignie*. He saw this as a preliminary and innovative moment of a rebellious *Waldgänger*: "running into the forest" was a metaphor for a retreat necessary for a new beginning. To the extent that he was an optimistic aristocrat, Jünger failed to see what makes this transcendence possible — the knowledge that one cannot reveal oneself completely before technology has fulfilled its destiny. A new era (or a new "epoch" of Being, if discussed in Heideggerian terms) would be waiting, and more so, because its arrival would further obscure perception.

In any case, the question of the fate of the world must take into account the reality of postmodern societies: mass societies on the way to generalized urbanization, the future megalopolis. Then, it is not a question of proud heroes, as brave and tragic as they may be. As with the gods, there is no longer the exemplary value of the epic of cathartic tragedies or dramas. For the most part, the epic and the theater are now objects of carefree distraction, pleasure, anachronistic manipulations, byproducts of the simulacra of the post-humanist epoch. It is no longer a question of Hegelian transcendence. Predicated on the same episteme of subjectivity, at the moment of their reconciliation the positive and the negative can only produce a radicalized version of their previous positivity. In fact, Hegelian transcendence is nothing but the activation of already present possibilities limited by the previous positivity. The virtuosity of Hegelian logic, the *Aufhebung*

35. Immanuel Kant, preface to the *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmel*, in the French edition, *Histoire Generale de la nature et theorie du ciel*, tr. by Francois Marty (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 47. Recent biological research illustrates this demiurgic will: "Biology is entering a new world; not only do we face a revolutionary leap in what we know, we also face radical changes in the tools we must use to understand this information. I am not sure we are prepared for the full impact of either, but we have already made our first step into the new world of genome. The challenge is now to translate the new biology into tangible benefits for humanity." See Peter Little, "The Book of Genes," in *Nature*, Vol. 402 (December 2, 1999), pp. 467-468.

36. Here, *über* is translated as transcendence, because the German word means "above, beyond, and upwards" at the same time. "Über die Lignie" is the title of an essay Jünger wrote in honor of Heidegger on the occasion of his 60th anniversary, in *Anteile. Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburstag* (Frankfurt a/m: Klostermann, 1950).

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articulated in the axiom "the real is the rational," legitimates the realization of these possibilities by removing the obstacles on their path.

Without the power to seize or predict the event (since the future is not immediately obvious), the previously mentioned revolution would be one where man would seek to flee from modern metaphysics, even in its most degraded, yet seductive forms. Yet, it is constantly actualized by the faith in the positivity of the immanent laws of techno-science as the *telos* of an ideal of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth, and as the realization of good government. That is what Jünger proposed to overcome with heroic, chivalrous (and yet illusory) ascetic exemplarity.[37] Could one really hope for such a possibility when faced with the magnitude of the disaster and the spread of alienation? The disaster of desocialization can be seen everywhere as productive work demands less and less human intervention and communication systems constantly increase the distance between people with really-human faces (whether quiet or violent). The symptoms are Internet chats, laser-guided weapons, existential experiences consumed in TV images or on computers. Disasters in politics result from the spread of political correctness, which has become the global *doxa* and has replaced *polemos* as the foundation of democracy. Thus, individualization is reduced to the hypertrophy of an individual unable to deal with others,[38] except when recognizing a reassuring sameness which presents itself as the simulacrum of difference. Unaware of the social, economic, and cultural reality, most people see all this as a multiplicity of possibilities for onanistic consumption.[39]

In order for a new representation to emerge, both of the self to the self and to others, this possible transcendence must already be *in nuce* in the very heart of the most radical modernity. In the flow of time, which today

37. This type of transcendence is already prefigured in the anti-Nazi novel that Jünger wrote on the eve of WWII, *Auf den Marmorklippen* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1960), long before drafting his essay in honor of Heidegger.

38. See Claude Karnoouh, "Logos without Ethos. On Interculturalism and Multiculturalism," in *Telos* 110 (Winter 1998).

39. See Baudrillard, *L'Echange impossible*, *op. cit.*; and Peter Sloterdijk, *Essai d'intoxication volontaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 26. "The 'last man' is the mystical consumer, the integral user of the world, i.e., the individual who does not reproduce, but sees himself as the final stage of evolution. This human type populates the large cities of the modern world. Thus, one sees here a *devotio postmoderna*, i.e., the recoiling of the individual upon himself." Through this practice, one can see how much the hypertrophy of this account of otherness exemplifies the ideological justification of this schizoid individualism: presently, the ideal other is no longer the "savage," the old peasant, the "dangerous classes," other cultures and their irreducible differences, but another *myself*, object of my own contemplation. Is this not what the "global village" of leisure, trips, immigration, sports, information, market, and Internet, organized by the new world order, seeks to be all about?

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is reducible to the eternal presence of things and events, i.e., in a non-temporality, Jünger's hope seems demented. How can one catch a beacon of hope in ecology, which pretends to take up the contemporary challenge posed by the development of techno-science? As a new, middle-class hedonism, ecology generates new commodities, and thus, in its own way, participates in the extension of the commercial spheres. No catastrophy, whether nuclear (Chernobyl), chemical (Bhopal), biological (mad cow disease), or ecological (oil spills), can halt this movement. In the truth of its presence, it seems inevitable, following the blind course of its power as normal and "natural."[40]

While politely criticizing Jünger's optimism, Heidegger, for his part, is unable to escape this very same optimism. Did he not push Jünger's heroic will toward a firm and serene awaiting for the end of destiny? Heidegger does not seem to have given up all hope. Rather, he suggests a possible end of nihilism, although he is careful to set a certain expiration. Nonetheless, when, echoing Jünger, Heidegger talks about a zero line, does he not suggest the coming of an implosion, this time echoing Nietzsche's "glacial agitation" of nihilism? Would the zero line of the implosion not be the beginning of a new "talk about Being"? In other words, and to remain faithful to the Heideggerian vocabulary, would the zero line not discover a new light? What idealism remained in Heidegger's thoughts concerning history is revealed in that this zero line can be seen as a *topos* of a new élan of human freedom. As for the present, as given, nothing seems less assuring.

The same hope runs through Granel's work on what he calls the "secession," which appeals to the idea of a spiritual revolution, where the phenomenological critique of Marx's *Capital* would be combined with Heidegger's critique of technology and Wittgenstein's deconstruction of language games. The next struggle could only take place through a reconsideration of the writings of Marx, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein.[41] "The fire which it rides is a spiritual fire. It need only take into consideration

40. As Heidegger wrote: "The achievement of nihilism, dressed in a formidable lucidity, is not already its end. The achievement of nihilism is only the beginning of the final phase of nihilism, whose zone would be unusually large, because it would be totally dominated by a 'normal state' and by the consolidation of this state." And he adds: "This is why the zero line where the achievement would come to an end is not yet visible in the world." See Martin Heidegger, "Contribution à la question de l'être," in *Question I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 209-210. This essay was a response to Ernst Jünger's "Uber die Ligne," *op. cit.*

41. Gerard Granel, "La guerre de secession ou tou ce que Farias ne vous a pas dit et que vous auriez prefere ne pas savoir," in *Ecrits logiques et politiques*, *op. cit.*, pp. 341-382.

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popular patience, popular impatience, the passion that the population suffers in the ashes of what remains of this spiritual fire." But where is this population? It packs in the stadiums, it is hypnotized in front of TV, it salivates in desire before the objects thrown at them. Would it become powerless? Would it become the unconscious slave of power under the umbrella of gigantic forces seeking to torment it — indeed to liquidate it?

Why not listen and take the "enemy" seriously? Why not pay attention to Fukuyama, not about the nonsense he spouts about the democratic irenism of postcommunism, but about what is relevant to the future of societies which have become subjugated by developments of genetic engineering, neurobiology and cybernetic?[42] "The true power of actual research resides in its ability to modify even human nature. In the future . . . biotechnology would be able to complete what ancient ideologies have unsuccessfully tried to accomplish: to create a new human type. . . . Two or three generations down the line, we will have the knowledge and technology necessary to succeed where social engineers failed. At that stage, we would have definitely put an end to human history, because we would have abolished human being as such. Thus, a post-human history would have begun."[43] The first conclusion that follows is that mass democracies in the age of post-humanism would certainly be better, more efficient, than the "prehistoric" attempts of totalitarianisms of the first half of the 20th century. As Bernard Cassen points out, it seems that a capitalism of a third type is quite popular.[44] The author highlights some strong expressions in regard to the means envisaged by the masters of the world (i.e., the directors of ever larger firms and White House experts): "the solutions are terrifying, even 'final.' It is sufficient simply to put the finishing touch here and there, to accelerate and amplify existing 'strong tendencies' to achieve the desired result — which is going on in particular by means of the 'natural' dry-cleaning of a

42. For examples of the interrelation of biological and cybernetic research, see Edward M. Marcotte, *et. al.*, "A Combined Algorithm for genome-wide prediction of protein function," in *Nature*, vol. 402 (Nov. 4, 1999), pp. 83-84 (posted at www.nature.com). See also Joubert-Caron and Michel Caron, "Proteome et analyse proteomique: de nouveaus concepts pour de nouveaux champs d'applications biomedicales," in *Medicine/Sciences*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (May 1999). To understand the global nature of this research, see "The DNA Sequence of Human Chromosome 22," in *Nature*, Vol. 402 (Dec. 2, 1999), pp. 489-495. This article is signed by 180 researchers, belonging to 9 institutions in Great Britain, the US, Japan, Sweden, assisted by more than 3,000 engineers and technicians (this article can be found on www.nature.com).

43. Francis Fukuyama, in *National Interest* (Summer 1999).

44. Bernard Casses, "Un plan de 'sauvetage' du capitalisme," in *Le Monde diplomatique* (December 1999). This is a review of Susan George, *The Lugano Report. On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first century* (London: Pluton Press, 1999).

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large part of humanity."[45] Is this not the definitive arrival of "unclean creatures"? Meanwhile, journalists amuse audiences with "neos": neo-fascism, neo-nazism, neo-communism. This qualification, however, does not prevent them from being violent, and does not exempt them from falling prey to normalized forms of post-modern mobilization: football, hard-rock, alcohol, drugs, etc.

The decoding of the human genome, the cloned sheep Dolly, South Korea's experiments with human embryos, *Big Blue*'s victory over the chess champion Boris Kasparov, and last but not least, Ray Kurzweil's research on artificial intelligence[46] seem to support Fukuyama, who does not say anything original, but is naive enough to describe the current state of affairs and draw the logical conclusions. Research in genetic engineering and its connections with cybernetics demonstrates how this is the threshold of an anthropo-biological mutation. More fateful and historical than Heidegger's, Jünger's voluntaristic and ethical hope presupposes a man genetically identical to his ancestor *homo sapiens*. Since the undertaking of conscious efforts to control the human genetic stock — both for good (the cure of genetic diseases)[47] and for bad (the transformation of the genetic structure) — the hopes for new forms of freedom seem to have been compromised. After the deployment of lobotomy in support of propaganda[48] (what in democracies are called "shows," "advertising" or "publicity"), people are ready to accept, in the name of progress, the judgment of scientific, economic and political experts — i.e., scholars, technocrats and

45. Frederic F. Clairmont, "Ces firmes geantes qui se jouent des Etats," in *Le Monde Diplomatic*, *op. cit.* The notion of a "final" solution had hitherto been reserved only for the Nazi regime's 1941 decision at the Wannsee conference to eliminate European Jews and Gypsies.

46. See Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (New York: Viking, 1999).

47. This research has been questioned. See Marc Pechanski, "Thérapie genique du rêve à la (dure) realité scientifique," in *Medecine/Sciences*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (May 1999), pp. 591-593. This article outlines the collusion between research and finance: "Gene therapy has been a dream of researchers, doctors, patients, as well as industrialists and financiers. This is the harsh scientific reality." To realize the magnitude of the investments involved, see Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's announcement concerning budget allocations for genetic research for over the next 5 years: over 1 billion francs to projects connecting "public laboratories to private enterprises," in *Le Monde* (December 5-6, 1999).

48. See Alexander Zinoviev, *La Grande Rupture. Sociologie d'un monde bouleversé* (Lausane: L'Age d'homme, 1999). What is essential here is the instauration by the ruling class of a "supereconomy," as well as the directors and the means of social control necessary for the extension of the empire. A sociological book, it fails to notice that this economy, inextricably tied to the foundation of science based on modern metaphysics, cannot be brought about without the use of the most radical and intense deployment of this mode of knowledge, one of whose essential effects is the alteration of the biological basis of human nature.

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financiers — the alteration of what, since the origins of the species, has made human beings biologically what they are. At any rate, there is nothing original in Fukuyama. In his prophetic novel, *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley describes it as the ultimate utopia of a fulfilled modernity: "Those who govern the *Brave New World* could well not be of a sound mind (in what could be called the absolute sense of this word); but they are not lunatics and their aim is not anarchy but social stability."[49] And adds: "A modern Procrustus, the nuclear scientist will prepare the bed in which humanity will have to lie; and if humanity does not adapt, so much the worse for humanity."[50] Furthermore: "It is likely that all world governments will be more or less totalitarian, even before the use of nuclear energy; but what seems certain is that they will be totalitarian during and after it has been used." This needs to be quoted in full in order to show the extent to which the authors, who today pretend to provide an original critique of the contemporary world, have forgotten their more lucid predecessors. After the defeat of Nazi Germany in WWII, and after having published a critique of Stalinism, Huxley unreservedly stated that: "A truly 'efficient' totalitarian state is one in which the omnipotent executive committee of political leaders and their army of directors rule a population of slaves, whom it is useless to restrain, because they love their servitude. To make them love it is the task assigned by today's totalitarian states [this was written in 1947, and Huxley already uses the plural, ck] to the minister of propaganda, to journal editors of and to school principals. But their methods are still harsh and unscientific."

Huxley adds that, as people must be made to love their servitude, it is advisable to guarantee, on the one hand, "economic security without which there is no chance love of servitude would appear," and on the other, to implement "greatly improved techniques of persuasion, and later drugs," in order to ultimately elaborate an "eugenic system, meant to standardize human products and thus to facilitate the directors' tasks."

The model of the future global totalitarian state is a nuclear one, which Huxley described in the following terms: "a single supra-national totalitarianism, generated by the social chaos resulting from rapid and

49. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), p. viff.

50. This expresses what could be the motto of modernity, both democratic and totalitarian: "If people are not good, change the people." This sounds like Fukuyama's description of the ultimate goal of capitalism, as described in Susan George's *The Lugano Report*, *op. cit.*, concerning which Bernard Cassen, *op. cit*, writes: "Susan George proposes a true mirror of really existing capitalism, of its ecological, economic and social 'horror'." One could add "scientific horror," because science has become its driving engine.

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general technological progress and the atomic revolution in particular, and developing, under the need for efficiency and stability, the form of a welfare-tyranny of Utopia." In order to comprehend the implications of this model and its implementation, one needs only to add to the global danger posed by the nuclear revolution, those posed by the cybernetic and biological revolutions. Huxley further elaborated this analysis twelve years later. This is what he writes about modern techno-science in *Brave New World Revisited*,[51] which today is totally forgotten: "modern technology has led to the concentration of economic and political power as well as the emergence of a controlled society (with ferocity in totalitarian states, courtesy and discretion in democracies) by big business and big government."[52] After communism imploded, the most accurate model was no longer Orwells *1984*, but *Brave New World*. Today, when there are no more enemies embodying "absolute evil," or alternative models able to raise people's hopes, the capitalism of mass democracies is much less courteous and discrete toward its citizens, revealing a brutality that was supposed to have disappeared after the second half of the 20th century or to have been relegated to Third World countries.

The illusion that this is a recent phenomenon should be dispelled; this process has been unfolding since the beginning of capitalism. "It is this metamorphosis of the concentration of wealth and political power that prompted Walter Rathenau . . . to claim that 'three hundred men, who know each other personally, control the economic destinies of Europe and choose their successors among themselves.' Since then, what has changed is that in Europe the three hundred have been reduced to a hundred and fifty. They have reconfigured capital not only in the US, but also in France, in UK, Germany and Japan, i.e., in the five countries which have dominated the global economy since the beginning of the century, and constitute close to 90% of the directors of the planet's two hundred leading companies."[53] Those same countries were the major players in both world wars. They not only impoverished people, but also accelerated the liquidation of European and Japanese archaism, and the deployment and renewal of existing scientific, technical, and financial capital. Since the beginning of modernity, it has always been the same enterprises, the same financial organizations or their direct heirs that lead the chorus, while constantly modifying their technological investments in the most sophisticated and profitable objects, which are

51. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: Harper, 1958).
52. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
53. Clairmont, "Ces firmes géantes . . . ," *op. cit.*

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also the product of scientific innovations financed by the same capital.

Neither Baudrillard's most recent reflections on cloning nor Sloterdijk's profound and subtle response to Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* enunciate anything truly original.[54] Both Huxley and Foucault had already put out warnings, but who remembers?[55] Only Granel has broached this tragic "prehistory" of post-modernity, already perceivable in the 1930s.[56] As a functionalist, Huxley saw *Brave New World* in relation to nuclear power and biology; as a structuralist, Foucault speculated not only about an atomic supra-sovereignty which could kill millions of people, even life itself, but also about biology as bio-power able to produce life, mutants, viruses, and superior organisms: "A formidable extension of bio-power which, unlike . . . atomic power, would destroy all human sovereignty."[57]

Nowadays, even more than nuclear power and biology, or biology developing new life-forms, the threat comes from cybernetics,[58] genetics, neurobiology, and robotics, which are quietly developing a new eugenics: the organization of a world divided into masters and programmed slaves, a subordination predicated on new scientific knowledge. Based on a capitalism radicalized through the concentration of financial means, the growth of production, and the extension of its market over the whole planet, this eugenics sharpens the distinction between wealth and poverty.

54. Baudrillard, *L'echange impossible*, *op. cit.*; Sloterdijk, "Regles pour le parc humain. . ." *op. cit.*; and Martin Heidegger, *Über den Humanusmus* (Frankfurt a/m: Vittorio Klostermann, 1949).

55. If a film (modernity's strongest narrative) translates into images Huxley's model, it is Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, rather than Stanley Kubrick's *2001*, which remains embroiled in hopes impregnated by a powerless humanism.

56. Gerard Granel, "Les années trente sont devant nous," *op. cit.*

57. Michel Foucault, "Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France, 1976," March 1976 (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1997), p. 226.

58. See "IBM promises scientists 500-fold leap in supercomputing power . . .," in *Nature*, Vol. 402 (Dec. 16, 1999). "Biologists are hailing IBM's $100 million project to build a 'petaflop' computer as likely to revolutionize our understanding of cellular biology. The computer would be 500 times faster than today's most powerful supercomputer." Since, according to Moore's law, computers' processing power doubles every two years, this interrelation leads directly to the subjugation of man to computers. For a discussion of the political and economic stake in this research, see Philippe Delmas, in *Le Bel avenir de la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 146: "IBM's expenditures on programming research are larger than those of any country except Japan and the US." See Mimi Zucker, "Mind over Matter. Getting Rat Thoughts to Move Robotic Parts," in *Scientific American* (Nov. 1999), Section on *Neurorobotics*. "They also developed a neural-network computer program, capable of changing its output based on previous input, and used the recording to 'train' the neural network to recognize brain activity patterns. . . . They trained a neural network with these recordings to recognize certain movement-related patterns and to translate them into directions for a computer-simulated arm incorporating two joints and six muscles."

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The rich make children with traits that allow them to dominate.[59] As for the poor, they could be created according to the needs of production, and in relation to the displacement of human labor by machines. This process paves the way for tomorrow's robotics, i.e., a new alliance of nano- and micromechanics, optics, electronics, biology, and cybernetics. No restrictive legislation could stop this process. Law, rights and morality always disappear in front of research requirements.[60] This is illustrated by Foucault, in relation to the changes in the 19th century discourse of racist historicism: at that time, state power was no longer "guaranteed by magico-juridical rituals, but by normalizing medical technology. At the price of a transfer from law to norm, from the juridical to the biological. . . ."[61] If today it is no longer a matter of racial "purity," but of class homogeneity, the programming of consciousness, the absolute subjugation to techno-economic domination, it does not matter; the mechanism remains the same. The globalization of technology and economics, which renders the nation-state politically obsolete, has necessitated this translation, where the "purity" of the nation-race-state is no longer the main objective. Rather, what is at stake is the separation of wealth and poverty, and new modes of domination, subjugation, and subordination.

In his 1976 course, Foucault opposed Nazism and communism on two possible points: 1) "This is how, in the Nazi era, state racism would be accompanied by a bunch of connotations like, e.g., the struggle of the subjugated Germanic races. . . In other words: Nazi reconversion, reimplantation, reinscription of state racism in the legend of warring races."[62] 2) "In the face of this Nazi transformation, there is the transformation of the Soviet type. . . . it consists in returning and reiterating the revolutionary discourse of social struggle. . . . concerning the administration of a police which guarantees the silent hygiene of an ordered society. What the revolutionary discourse designated as the class enemy would become, in Soviet state racism, a sort of biological danger. What is a class enemy

59. How else to interpret the sale of eggs of top models on the internet! Buyers, however, are not yet protected against genetic hazards, although only a few manipulations would be sufficient to control the joining of the eggs of top models with the sperm of Nobel Prize winners, great musicians, famous men or women, to make sure that those genetic hazards do not create unpleasant surprises. As Bernard Shaw pointed out to a pretty lady who wanted him to make her a baby having her beauty and the master's intelligence, the fruit of their love could have turned out to have his beauty and her intelligence!

60. Anne Maclean, *The Elimination of Morality. Reflections on Utilitarianism and Bioethics* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 17-36.

61. Foucault, "Il faut défendre la societé," *op. cit.*, p. 171.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

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now? Well, it is the sick, the devious, the crazy."

Yet, if these descriptions designate a "takeover of man as a living being, a kind of statization of the biological. . . ."[63] today, to the extent that the nation-state is no longer an adequate political form for global techno-capital,[64] capitalism takes over the biological, even if it has to use state institutions inherited from a previous era. As Claude Allegre put it bluntly: ". . . there is a proposal to patent DNA sequences as if they were inventions, algorithms for writing music or for creating synthetic images."[65] Is this not a synthesis of the two versions of racism as the will of the global state to fine-tune economic exchange — a synthesis meant to impose "biologized" social divisions, combined with the rhetoric of pseudo-difference articulated over the quest for "roots" and a spectacular communitarian, mediatized or commodified multiculturalism?

This would be a totally pacified and domesticated *socius*, where the slaves are happy with the projected state of affairs, which provides a good dose of identitarian illusions, drugs, images, and real or virtual sex. How can one imagine any kind of enlightenment? In such a world there cannot be any hope to see the coming of "a new epoch for talking about being." It is the realization that there is *No Future*, there will be no more revolts: the achievement of the modern barbarism of experts, where there will only be the memory of some technobiological "misapplications." Handled with appropriate methods of confinement, neuroleptics and information implants, one can easily imagine these "misapplications" crowded in future human zoos, where, next to several surviving specimens of archaic Asiatic or Pacific tribes, peasants belonging to another era, bizarre individuals, teratologic witnesses of times long gone, they would be on display, to the ignorant and amnesic glances of the new people. For the last time, the new man — who would really be last one, without past or future — would be shown how the "good old times" were really full of misery

63. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

64. See Roger Caillois, *op. cit.*, p. 228. "In the same way that once royalty constituted itself at the expense of the people in the fiefs, because gun factories making cannons could only be built and maintained through public finances, the era of nation-states is approaching the time when they are too poor to finance the construction of laboratories and factories capable of producing in sufficient quantities the kind of weapons made possible by modern science, and to use them efficiently." In today's modernity, there can be no political power without its scientific research being integrated with large capitalist enterprises: "The weakness and the small size of most nation-states in comparison to big private enterprises or to the movement of capital make them unable to control their economic situation." See Delmas, *Le Bel avenir de la guerre*, *op. cit.*

65. Allegre, *op. cit.*

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and, worse yet, of worry and anguish. Henceforth, there would be no need for political commissars or for the orthopedic explications of sociologists, psychoanalysts, political scientists, or even philosophers. They would all be superfluous. Then, the new sergeants of "posthumanity," called biologists, doctors, computer scientists, experts in robotics and technocrats of the techno-finance, would order journalists to shout to the world: "Rest in peace, brave people, we look after your happiness!"

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Nietzsche's Affirming Negation of Christianity

Daniel Pellerin

To think with Nietzsche is to think against him.[1] He would have been intrigued, then, by recent claims that he was ultimately a Christian thinker.[2] The force of his invective against Christianity remains such, however, that a strong argument along these lines might seem hard to sustain; and yet Nietzsche's conceptions of individual greatness and human well-being amount to much more than the plain repudiation of Christian ideals for which they are all-too-easily taken.[3] Even while he cursed the

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1. Tyler T. Roberts, *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 5.

2. Roberts, Santaniello, and Clegg are among a slew of recent commentators who depict Nietzsche as a religious thinker, though an ambivalent one. See Weaver Santaniello, ed., *Nietzsche and the Gods* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), p. xiii. Roberts finds Nietzsche's writings to be replete with the "language of the divine" and sees them as vital "resources for reimagining religion." While he hesitates to call Nietzsche a Christian thinker, he is tempted to do so (pp. 9, 11, 15, 23, 48, and 203-4). For Jerry S. Clegg ("Life in the Shadow of Christ: Nietzsche on *Pistis* versus *Gnosis*," Ch. 9 in Santaniello, *op. cit.*, p. 161), "Nietzsche never poses as anything other than a religious writer. . . . [A]ll his battles are theological ones."

3. See Jörg Salaquarda, "Nietzsche and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition," Ch. 3 in Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 91. In a similar vein, Roberts concludes that Nietzsche's attacks on religion and Christianity never diminished his appreciation for the crucial roles they have played in the development of culture and the human soul. Throughout Nietzsche's writings, there is "a glancing equivocation between religion and antireligion. . . . Nietzsche led a philosophical life that resisted the religious traditions that have shaped Western civilization only at the same time that he accomplished a transformative renewal of their disciplines and passions." See Roberts, *Contesting Spirit*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 and 69; Clegg ("Life in the Shadow of Christ," *op. cit.*, p. 160), and Catherine Zuckert ("Nietzsche on the Origin and Development of the Distinctively Human," in *Polity* 16, No. 1 [Fall 1983], p. 68), observe that Nietzsche recognizes the historical role of the priests as guardians and saviors of civilization.

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religious patrimony of the West, Nietzsche affirmed its crucial importance for shaping and developing the culture and spirit by which religion is at last overcome.

Only when Nietzsche narrows his perspective does Christianity appear simply as a curse, a madness, the highest corruption, "the greatest misfortune of humanity so far."[4] Where he assesses the influence of Christianity more comprehensively, the subtleties of his argument belie his vituperative outbursts. In Nietzsche's eyes, the spiritual turn always remains a disease, but one "pregnant" with the future, both terrible and sublime.[5] While declaring himself to be an irreconcilable opponent of Christianity, Nietzsche does not wish to be understood as crudely as he sometimes speaks: even as "the calamity of millennia," the phenomenon of Christianity represents a "tremendous question mark" replete with meaning that raises much deeper questions than those of blame.[6] What lies beyond good and evil would look very diffrent if approached from another vantage point, and even the redeeming creators of value Nietzsche envisages bear not only the hopes of mankind, but also the unmistakable marks of their ancestry.

I

Nietzsche welcomes the prospect of Christianity's final demise: when the time has come, it will end, like all great things, by overcoming itself. Thus, even at the height of his polemic, Nietzsche emphasizes that an "inestimable debt" is owed to sovereign religion in general and the Christian spirit in particular: for the Christian God will be conquered by none other than the refinement of Christian morality, which "must end by

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals," in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), Part II, §22, p. 93; "Twilight of the Idols or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1982), p. 552; "The Antichrist," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, *op. cit.*, §51, p. 634, §62, pp. 655-56.

5. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part II, §16, p. 85 and §19, p. 88.

6. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, *op. cit.*, §36, p. 609; *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part III, §16, p. 129. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, "Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is," in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, op. cit.*, p. 233. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §381, p. 343: "One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood." His own experience, Nietzsche writes, had been that "whoever thought he had understood something of me had made up something out of me after his own image." *Ecce Homo, op. cit.*, p. 261. On the possibility that Nietzsche cannot be fully understood at all, see Erich Heller, *The Artist's Journey into the Interior* (New York: Random House, 1959), pp. 202-203: "'Do you understand Nietzsche?' is like asking 'Do you know Rome?' The answer is simple only if you have never been there."

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drawing its most striking inference, its inference against itself."[7]

According to Nietzsche, it is precisely the fight against the Church that has generated a "magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which has never yet existed on earth" — and one that has brought the most distant spiritual goals within reach. Christianity's tyrannical hold over the European imagination, the very caprice and "grandiose stupidity" of its moral interpretations, educated the European spirit and allowed it to soar to unprecedented heights.[8] To be sure, Nietzsche characterizes the Christian faith as "a sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit; at the same time, enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation."[9] But this very self-sacrifice has also had an educational function: only by a "slave-like, forced and gruesome submission" to the Christian paradigm was the European spirit disciplined and cultivated, at last producing something for whose sake it has been worthwhile to live on earth.[10] What is true of man in general applies especially to the Christian: the most bungled and sickly of animals is also "the most interesting." From a divine or philosophical perspective, Nietzsche argues, the earth may well "deserve a divine glance, a divine sympathy, just because of this curious case."[11] The European Christian of Nietzsche's day may hobble on the scene a stunted, atrophied creature, perhaps even a "miscarriage"[12] — yet a "sublime" and

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), §62, p. 75. See also *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part III, §27, pp. 160-61; *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §357, p. 307.

8. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, Preface, p. 2 and §188, p. 101. See also *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 254, where Nietzsche — "against his wont and conviction" — sides with the "selfless" drives: because they can be employed in the service of self-discipline.

9. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §46, p. 60.

10. *Ibid.*, §188, p. 101.

11. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, *op. cit.*, §14, p. 580 and §39, p. 614; *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part II, § 16, p. 85; and *Ibid.*, Part I, §7, p. 33: "Human history would be altogether too stupid a thing without the spirit that the impotent have introduced into it."

12. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, *op. cit.*, §38, p. 611; *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §62, p. 75. Likewise the Jews, whose historical significance Nietzsche sees in precipitating a "slave rebellion in morals," first made man interesting and gave life "a novel and dangerous attraction for a couple of millennia." See *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §195, p. 108. It was through the priestly form of existence introduced by Judaism that man became an interesting animal, that "his soul in a higher sense [acquired] *depth* and [became] *evil* — and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts." See *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I, §6, p. 33. If the victory of the masses occurred through the Jewish people, Nietzsche argues, then "no people has ever had a more world-historic mission!" *Ibid.*, §9, p. 36. Although it is a symptom of the diminution and decline of man, the democratic movement echoes the "unequaled popular-moral genius" of the Jewish people. See *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §203, p. 117; *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I, §16, p. 53 and Part III, §25, p. 154; *The Antichrist*, *op. cit.*, §24, p. 593 and §44, p. 620.

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fascinating one. Nietzsche sees no contradiction between the crude and the subtle dimensions of the Christian "comedy."[13]

Clearly, Nietzsche finds much to deplore in what Christianity has wrought; but there are few simple negatives in his thought. The same Christian evolution that spawned the nihilism of Western modernity also deepened man, spiritualizing his instincts and allowing them to be expressed in ever more delicate forms until at last the honed conscience turns against God. What finally triumphs over the Christian God is the consequence of "two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself the *lie* in faith in God."[14] Accordingly, Nietzsche emphasizes that the overcoming of morality remains a task for the finest and most honest consciences, and that a form of piousness stronger than piety, a religiosity richer than religion prevails long after the idea of God has been discredited.[15]

For Nietzsche, there is a sense in which even the "new philosophers and free spirits" — those invigorated by news of God's death — remain *pious*:[16] "We seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still

13. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §62, p. 75.

14. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §357, p. 307. As Dannhauser puts it, "The Christian God is killed by intellectual probity, which is the consummation of Christian morality." See Werner J. Dannhauser, "Friedrich Nietzsche," in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed., ed. by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 837. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht: Versuch einer Umwertung aller Werte*, 13th ed. (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1996), §1, p. 7. The author recognizes the difficulties raised by the chaotic and complex "intellectual diary" that is Nietzsche's *Nachlaß*, especially in the form imposed on it by Peter Gast and Nietzsche's sister. See Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, "Nietzsches Nachlaß 1885-1888 und der 'Wille zur Macht'," in *Kommentar zu Band 1-13*, Vol. 14 of *Kritische Studienausgabe* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), pp. 384, 386 and 392-393. Discouraged by the "torturous" progress he was making, Nietzsche intended the papers collected in the *Will to Power* only for himself, as he emphasizes in his letters to Gast of February 13 and 26, 1888, and dismissed the prospect of publication as "basically unthinkable." See Colli and Montinari, eds., *Nietzsche: Briefwechsel (Kritische Gesamtausgabe)*, Vol. III-5 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), pp. 252, 264. The authenticity of this material is not in doubt, however, and it does offer revealing insights into the inner life of a uniquely dynamic intellect. If these fragments cannot be seen as reflecting Nietzsche's considered opinions, neither should his more outrageous posturing and penchant for hyperbole be allowed to disqualify those sometimes highly illuminating passages that cohere more readily with material appearing elsewhere.

15. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §32, p. 45. See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (New York: Meridian, 1956), p. 307; and Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 119.

16. Zarathustra, for one, is described as "the most pious of all those who do not believe in God." See Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, *op. cit.*, Part IV, pp. 372 and 374.

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take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato."[17] As intellectual probity, Christian morality appears not only instrumental to its own undermining; as Leo Strauss has argued, it may well remain at work even in those who supersede moral man as we know him.[18] According to Karl Löwith, too, even post-Christianity bears the distinct stamp of its ancestry, since the new nobility who are to take God's place in the world must do so as the "final fruit from the tree of Christian morality" — or not at all.[19] If a select few individuals will eventually be able to "enjoy the whole self-sufficiency of a god and his whole power of self-redemption," this is only by the "strange means" of religious training and by the Christian pre-history of Western man.[20]

If this seems an odd conclusion, it may be because the dialectical nature of all of Nietzsche's thinking is not always fully appreciated. For him, to love one's God is to chasten him and to invite his wrath — just as a good friend should be one's best enemy.[21] The way to show one's respect, to friend and enemy alike, is not by agreement so much as by an "attentive resistance."[22] Thus, Nietzsche makes much of his choice of

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17. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §344, p. 283; and *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part III, §24, pp. 150, 152. See also Salaquarda, *op. cit.*, p. 90: "Until the end, Nietzsche remained suspicious that his own analyses themselves might be based on Christian impulses, that his own critiques might instantiate rather than set aside the object of his analysis."

18. Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 12. See also Leo Strauss' contention that the doctrine of the will to power is "in a manner a vindication of God," though an atheistic one. In this view, religiosity is the ability to affirm everything that ever was, or will be, and is not dependent on religion. See Leo Strauss, "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, Vol. IV, ed. by Daniel W. Conway (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 327-329.

19. Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, tr. by David E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 312. See also Nietzsche's discussion of "the *sovereign individual* . . . liberated again from the morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral" as the "ripest fruit" of man's protracted moral and spiritual training. *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part II, §2-3, pp. 59-60.

20. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §300, p. 240; and §377, p. 340: "We have outgrown Christianity and are averse to it precisely because . . . our ancestors were Christians who in their Christianity were uncompromisingly upright."

21. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 128 and 168. Nietzsche demands that one love and be proud of one's enemies, since their successes are also one's own. Zarathustra, in particular, is distinguished by his capacity for loving his enemies. *Ibid.*, Part I, p. 160; Part II, p. 196; Part III, p. 321; and Part IV, p. 415.

22. "In a friend one should have one's best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him." *Ibid.*, Part I, p. 168. See also Roberts, *Contesting Spirit*, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-93.

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opponents,[23] proposing to challenge only victorious causes that he would face alone, demonstrating goodwill, even gratitude by his attacks. The most serious Christians, Nietzsche contends, "have always been well-disposed to me."[24]

The same reasoning applies to the democratic impulses that Nietzsche attributes to Christianity, and which he rejects. It is precisely the decadent democratic impulses of the modern spirit, fostered by Christianity, that create the conditions for genius and greatness to flourish.[25] The weak and the strong, the hapless "herd-animals" and those "magical, unfathomable" individuals predestined for greatness belong together like the two faces of the same coin.[26] Individuals and societies acquire profundity and spiritual refinement when such opposite types are pitted against each other, when "slave and master moralities," or irreconcilable valuations more generally, are locked into a bitter, intractable, but fecund struggle. Thus, though isolated, late-born and fundamentally different from his contemporaries, Napoleon[27] — "the heir of a stronger, older, more ancient civilization

23. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-233: "I honor, I distinguish by associating my name with that of a cause or a person: *pro* or *con* — that makes no difference to me at this point." See also *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Preface, §4, p. 18.

24. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 233. This is not as far-fetched as it may appear. Thus, according to Paul Tillich, Nietzsche, though an ardent enemy of religion and Christianity specifically, "knew more about the power of the idea of God than many faithful Christians." See Paul Tillich, "The Escape from God," Ch. 10 in *Nietzsche and the Gods*, op. cit., p. 174.

25. Abbey and Appel raise the important point that much Christian orthodoxy acted as a *check* on egalitarian aspirations in the world. See Ruth Abbey and Frederick Appel, "Nietzsche and the Will to Politics," in *Review of Politics* 60, No. 1 (Winter 1998), p. 110. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to explore this question further. The crucial point, in any case, is that even a doctrine that did indeed advance worldly egalitarianism might have had unexpected benefits for the development of the spirit.

26. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I §4, p. 28; and *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §200, p. 112; Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, *op. cit.*, p. 261. See also *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §242, pp. 176-77: "The very same new conditions that will on average lead to the leveling and mediocritization of man — to a useful, industrious, handy, multi-purpose herd animal — are likely in the highest degree to give birth to exceptional human beings of the most dangerous and attractive quality . . . . [I]n single, exceptional cases the strong human being will have to turn out stronger and richer than perhaps ever before."

27. Nietzsche considers him "the most isolated and late-born man there has ever been." See *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I, §16, p. 54. He credits Napoleon with "[bringing] back again a whole slab of antiquity, perhaps even the decisive piece, the piece of granite." See *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §362, p. 318. Such atavism is typical of great individuals: "I prefer to understand the rare human beings of an age as suddenly emerging late ghosts of past cultures and their powers — as atavisms of a people and its *mores*: that way one really can *understand* a little about them." *Ibid.*, §10, p. 84.

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than the one which was then perishing in France" — was made possible by the people's revolution. "The Corsican"[28] may have been stronger than his society, but it was the Revolution that begot him not as an aberration, but as its natural offspring. The French Revolution, in turn, was for Nietzsche "the daughter and continuation of Christianity."[29]

Since it is doubtful whether for Nietzsche there are genuine opposites, the purpose of his re-evaluations can hardly be one of forcing a final choice between opposing moralities, rather than redressing an imbalance between them.[30] Accordingly, Christianity and the "European herd-animal morality" that it engendered are threatening only in so far as they are taken to be more than specific moralities "beside which, before which, and after which many other types, above all higher moralities, are, or ought to be, possible."[31] The dullness of the "herd" has its uses, in other words, and may indeed be indispensable so long as it is kept in its place. Whereas higher cultures are distinguished by their capacity for being "as manifold as whole, as ample as full," everything unconditional "belongs in pathology."[32]

II

Nowhere does the "vituperative naysayer" in Nietzsche threaten to drown out more affirmative noises than when it comes to his diparagement of morality, Christian morality in particular.[33] Casting himself in the role of "first immoralist" and "annihilator *par excellence*," Nietzsche calls for

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28. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I, §16, p. 54; *Twilight of the Idols*, *op. cit.*, pp. 547 and 549; *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §877, p. 597. While Nietzsche was impressed by Napoleon's Corsican descent, this is only one dimension of his nobility.

29. *Ibid.*, §184, p. 134.

30. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §2, p. 10: "For one may doubt whether there are any opposites at all, and . . . whether these popular valuations and opposite values . . . are not perhaps merely foreground estimates, only provisional perspectives, perhaps even from some nook, perhaps from below, from perspective, as it were." "Above all," Nietzsche does "not wish to divest existence of its rich ambiguity." See *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §373, p. 335. For him: "The moral earth, too, is round." *Ibid.*, §289, p. 232.

31. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §202, p. 115. Thus, also Abbey and Appel, "Nietzsche and the Will to Politics," *op. cit.*, p. 109: "What really enrages Nietzsche about Christianity is not its values and virtues per se, but its claim to unique conceivability. He excoriates the way Christianity offers itself as the only version of the good, the only table of virtues, as above and applicable to all . . . . Thus Nietzsche is not intent on discrediting Christianity entirely, but on ending 'its tyranny'."

32. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §154, p. 90; §212, p. 139; §213, p. 140; and § 260, p. 204.

33. Roberts, *Contesting Spirit*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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morality to be "shot at," and for those who would enhance life to "sail right over morality," crushing and destroying its remains.[34] The revaluation of values is described as "the great war — conjuring up a day of decision" as he proposes to turn away from "any good-natured word."[35]

New truths will be revealed "in the midst of perfectly gruesome detonations": Nietzsche's Dionysus is "also the god of darkness."[36] His *Twilight of the Idols* is not only a "great declaration of war," but also a "demon that laughs," a book richer in substance, more independent and more subversive than any other, as well as *more evil*.[37] Apparently, man can attain greatness by "exemplifying all that is terrible and questionable in reality," and the enhancement of the species is served by "devilry of every kind" — "everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents."[38] In this light, Zarathustra appears to be "a friend of evil," though speaking in a "tender adagio."[39] The good and just seem to be perfectly justified in their terror: they would be right to call the overman evil, even devil.[40]

Yet, even here, things are not what they seem to be, and upon closer examination Nietzsche's position turns out to be much more subtle. Despising and destroying are expressions of reverence and an affirmative spirit;[41] negation is meant to be a dimension of Nietzsche's "great" and

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34. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 327; *Twilight of the Idols*, *op. cit.*, p. 472; and *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §23, p. 31.

35. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, pp. 310, 311.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

37. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, *op. cit.*, p. 466; *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

38. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 331; *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §44, pp. 54-55. Nietzsche celebrates "wickedness," likening the whole of philosophy to "playing the wicked game" (*Ibid.*, §205, p. 125) and eulogizing his own wicked thoughts in the final paragraph of *Beyond Good and Evil*. See also his reference to "sublime wickedness" and "an ultimate, supremely confident mischievousness in knowledge that goes with great health" in *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part II, §24, p. 96.

39. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, pp. 219 and 330. See also *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 228: "[W]hoever wants to be a creator in good and evil must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the greatest goodness: but this is — being creative." Likewise *Ibid*, Part IV, p. 400: "'Man must become better and more evil' — thus I teach. The greatest evil is necessary for the overman's best." See also Part III, p. 331.

40. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 331. However, Nietzsche also adds that it is the overman's kindness and goodness that appear as devilry to his inferiors. See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 256.

41. "I love the great despisers, because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore." *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 127. See also *Ibid.*, Part IV, p. 399.

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"sacred" Yes to life.[42] Though "a man of calamity," Nietzsche understands himself also as an unrivaled bringer of glad tidings.[43] Speaking in terms of calamity and good tidings, the very words with which he describes Christianity, Nietzsche underlines his closeness to what he is attacking.[44] This affinity should not be mistaken for affection, and yet it ties Nietzsche as firmly to his enemy as he could ever be bound to a friend.

When the gruesome detonations subside, then, Nietzsche can be heard insisting that his kind of "immoralists" are not prone to easy negation, but make it "a point of honor to be affirmers."[45] Rhetoric aside, such "old expressions" as "godless, unbelievers, or perhaps immoralist" do not come close to describing those who have attained a higher perspective.[46] Thus, when asking how Nietzsche's "sacred Yes" might take concrete shape in the modern world, it is not surprising to find him dismissing any thought of a return to the past, or of a restoration of the simple "master moralities" of yore — no matter how favorably their archaic innocence and vigor may compare with the decadence of the Christian age. Despite his high regard for the well-turned-out human beings of antiquity and his sympathetic account of healthy barbarians, Nietzsche never wavers in his conviction that such past glories can only be revisited, never recaptured. If the ancient flames are to flare up once more, the conflagration will require new fuel.[47] Nothing avails: "no one is free to be a crab" and one can only go forward.[48] Nietzsche's "new aristocrats" must therefore draw on the strengths of their own age, shaped by the Western Christian heritage.

What distinguishes this new kind of aristocrat, this higher human being, is his ability to produce unity and order out of confusion, his "synthetic, summarizing, justifying" strength.[49] Just as man is lord over

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42. *Ibid.*, Part I, p. 139: "For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed." The motif of this "great Yes" recurs throughout Nietzsche's writings. See *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 272, for a particularly rousing formulation: "This ultimate, most joyous, most wantonly extravagant Yes to life represents not only the highest insight, but also the *deepest*."

43. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 327: "I contradict as has never been contradicted before, and I am nevertheless the opposite of a No-saying spirit . . . . [O]nly beginning with me are there hopes again."

44. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §62, pp. 75-76, and *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

45. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, *op. cit.*, p. 491.

46. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §346, p. 286.

47. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I, §17, p. 54.

48. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, *op. cit.*, p. 547.

49. Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §867, p. 590.

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the earth, because he can synthesize his many contradictory impulses, as beasts cannot, so the overman becomes the highest human being by taking this synthesis to a new level. As "slave valuations" collapse under the weight of their own contradictions, the overman imposes his will on the welter of conflicting drives within modernity.[50] Specifically, he brings the character of the "master" to bear on the flux of sensations that the "slave" suffers, but cannot overcome, drawing on the breadth, emotional scope, and spiritual keenness of the latter's perspective. In other words, the overman's capacity to create values stands out precisely because the influences that have shaped the world around him are so varied and chaotic. Once such an individual has succeeded, nothing stands in the way of an all-embracing affirmation that would have been out of reach for his predecessors.[51]

The highest man would thus be one who could appreciate contradictions as they appear "from above," as simply necessary. Such a human being would be able to express the contradictory character of all existence, possessing the most manifold and powerful drives that remain bearable for anyone. The measure of his strength is the ability to live amidst opposites and to affirm them all in an eternal recurrence:[52] "Today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a 'higher nature,' a spiritual nature, than of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposing values."[53] While a lesser person would collapse under the stress of this task, the overman transcends the strain. As

50. See Nietzsche's characterization of the "madly thoughtless fragmentation and fraying of all foundations, their dissolution into an ever-flowing and dispersing becoming, the tireless entangling and historicizing of all that has come to be by modern man, that great garden spider in the node of the world web." Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, tr. by Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), §9, p. 50.

51. This paragraph draws heavily on John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 66-72 and 135-141.

52. Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §881, p. 599; §887, p. 602; §903, p. 610; and §968, p. 644.

53. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I, §16, p. 52. See also *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 129: "[O]ne must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star." As Frederick M. Dolan writes: "Nietzsche abandons . . . the metaphysical premises invoked to distinguish between the chaotic and the ordered. For him, the invocation of a chaotic reality need not ground a Superman who thrives on chaos in order to impose order. Rather, the Superman, who is not God but posthuman, affirms 'chaos' — the comings and goings of the world — not as that which is to be mastered, but as that which is to be loved, desired, 'willed' — and not the will of the slave who desires power in order to 'correct reality,' but the will of one who uses his powers to bestow gifts of meaning and beauty." See Frederick M. Dolan, "Worldly Pleasure: Hannah Arendt, Friedrich Nietzsche, Wallace Stevens, and 'Political' Consciousness," in *Polity* 33, No. 3 (Spring 2001), p. 449.

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John Richardson puts it, "He delights in the play of forces around him and can want more of them all."[54]

III

Speaking through Zarathustra, Nietzsche proposes to "teach men the meaning of their existence — the overman, the lightning out of the dark cloud of man."[55] The specific characteristics of this solitary redeemer may remain indeterminate; Nietzsche cautions that there has never been such an overman,[56] and that it remains for a stronger age to breed this specimen.[57] Yet two things are certain: first, that the steps leading toward

54. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, *op. cit.*, p. 136. According to Nietzsche, the highest spirituality emerges from a synthesis of all those states attributed to "merely moral men," as the ultimate product of antagonistic moralities acquired and eventually transcended through protracted struggle. In other words, higher spirits are products of moralities that have ended — "as does every good thing on earth" — by overcoming themselves. Napoleon, for example, embodies "the *problem* of the noble ideal as such," because he represents the "synthesis of the *inhuman* and *superhuman*." See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §219, p. 148 and §257, p. 201; *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I, §16, p. 54; Part II, §10, p. 73. The last passage has prompted Walter Kaufmann and Alan White to argue against too close an association of Napoleon with Nietzsche's overman on the grounds that the former represents the problem of the noble ideal *as opposed to its solution*. As Paul Glenn insists, however, Nietzsche's identification of a problem need not imply any disapproval of Bonaparte. The problem is how a man such as Napoleon could have emerged at all, how another one like him might emerge in the future, and what this would mean. Glenn suggests that in the end, Napoleon failed because he "succumbed to his own myth, coming to believe that he was the great servant of the French nation." This is the kind of problem that Napoleon exemplifies for Nietzsche: how the product of democratic Revolution could triumph over it only to end up succumbing to its corruption. See Paul F. Glenn, "Nietzsche's Napoleon: The Higher Man as Political Actor," in *Review of Politics* 63, No. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 138-139 and 152-153.

55. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 132. See also p. 125: "Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth."

56. *Ibid.*, *Part* II, p. 205: "Never yet has there been an overman. Naked I saw both the greatest and the smallest man: they are still all-too-similar to each other. Verily, even the greatest I found all-too-human." *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part IV, p. 370. At p. 399, even "the best" are distinguished from the overman, Zarathustra's "first and only concern." In *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 261, Nietzsche writes that the word "overman" designates "a type of supreme achievement" and is meant to be "a very pensive word." Accordingly, the overman cannot merely "aspire to greatness," as Magnus and Higgins claim, since he would need to have *attained* already a state beyond the merely human, however great. See Magnus and Higgins, "Nietzsche's Works and Their Themes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

57. See Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part II, §24, p. 96: "But some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the *redeeming* man of great love and contempt." See also Nietzsche, *On the Advantage . . .*, *op. cit.*, §9, p. 53: "No, the *goal of humanity* cannot lie at the end but only *in its highest specimens*."

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this goal will involve startling contradictions,[58] and second, that the theme of redemption by a solitary savior could hardly be more Christian, no matter how radically Nietzsche reinterprets the myth.[59]

A clue for understanding the elusive phenomenon of the overman can be found in Nietzsche's discussion of the higher human type more generally. While the two concepts should not be equated, there is sufficient overlap that one can learn about the one from the other. The overman is the final culmination of a higher, godlike class of men that is able to give new meaning to the world,[60] and Nietzsche moves between these categories without hesitation.[61] The call for a new nobility, on the one hand, and the anticipation of the overman, on the other, are dimensions of the same overarching concern: the liberation of man from nihilism and nothingness, and the restoration of hope where the "great nausea" threatens to sap all will to live.

Before outlining the concrete parameters of Nietzsche's nobility and relating them to the precepts of Christianity, two preliminary challenges need to be addressed. First, even if such greatness did have determinate characteristics, it might be difficult to identify and communicate them. Given the limitations of their inferiors, higher men not only have appearances against them, but they deliberately withdraw and disguise themselves:

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58. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 213: "Life wants to build itself up into the heights with pillars and steps . . . . And because it requires height, it requires steps and contradiction among the steps and the climbers."

59. It is no coincidence that in one central paragraph alone, Nietzsche refers four times to *redeeming* and *redemption* (*erlösen/Erlösung*). See Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part II, §24, p. 96.

60. See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part III, p. 315: "[A] new nobility is needed . . . to write anew upon new tablets the word 'noble.' For many who are noble are needed, and noble men of many kinds, that there may be a nobility. Or as I once said in a parable: 'Precisely this is godlike that there are gods, but no God." See Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, *op. cit.*, p. 262: "The new masters of the earth shall 'replace God' for the unbelieving masses." Magnus interprets the overman along similar lines as "Nietzsche's inverted secular god equivalent." Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888: *The Will to Power* and the *Übermensch*," in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, Vol. II, ed. by Daniel W. Conway (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 196-197. For Simmel, "nobility is the point at which the ideal Nietzsche teaches and the reality of his nature meet." See Georg Simmel, "The Morality of Nobility," in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, Vol. III, ed. by Daniel W. Conway (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 318.

61. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §143, p. 191, illustrates how easily Nietzsche moves between different aspects of the same question, that is the emergence of those rare, noble, godlike individuals that give human life meaning and value. When, toward the end of *Zarathustra*, he stresses that the assembled "higher men" have failed, he is speaking mockingly; if Zarathustra is "still [lacking] the right men," this is not to say that there cannot be such, even before man is transcended altogether. See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part IV, pp. 404 and 437.

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"Every choice human being strives instinctively for a citadel and a secrecy where he is saved from the crowd." Liable to misinterpretation by every sign of life they give, profound spirits require a mask to shield them from the prying eyes of the shallow-minded.[62] Thus "every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout, every word also a mask."[63] What is more, higher men not only do everything to protect themselves from being understood, they rarely have the right to understand themselves, and it would be misleading to be guided by their own misunderstandings.[64]

Second, because they are by their very nature exceptions to the rule, great individuals will be difficult to confine within analytical limits.[65] The noble man, so Zarathustra teaches, "stands in everybody's way."[66] In a sense, as Kaufmann claims, Nietzsche's higher men would "practice the lawful virtues spontaneously and instinctively" — but lawful only by their own standards, not those of their critics.[67] Higher human beings amount to a "magnificent madness of destiny": they are noble, but fleeting moments, beautiful but highly improbable flickers of light, for whom there is no lasting hope or assured place in the world.[68] The "law of absurdity in the whole economy of mankind" is revealed in that the higher a type a man represents, the less likely he is to turn out well, even under the most propitious circumstances. The likelihood that a noble soul will come to grief and perish is "in view of the multiplicity of the conditions of its

62. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §26, p. 37, §40, p. 51; and *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part III, §8, p. 110: "A spirit that is sure of itself speaks softly; it seeks concealment, it keeps people waiting." Great individuals always have appearances against them, because their need for solitude, their very strength of will and mastery of the virtues, tells against them, making them suspect. See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil, op. cit.*, §226, p. 155; §212, p. 139. By contrast, the need for what *appears* to be noble or great is "actually the eloquent and dangerous mark of its lack." *Ibid.*, §287, p. 228.

63. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §289-290, p. 229.

64. *Ibid.*, §27, p. 39; §256, p. 196. See also §249, p. 185: "What is best in us we do not know — we cannot know." Likewise, Nietzsche prefaces his *Geneology of Morals* by cautioning that men of knowledge are necessarily strangers to themselves: "[W]e *have* to misunderstand ourselves, for us the law 'Each is furthest from himself' applies to all eternity." *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Preface, §1, p. 15; and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part III, pp. 305-06: "[O]f all the treasures, it is our own that we dig up last. . . . Man is hard to discover — hardest of all for himself."

65. Nietzsche thinks, nonetheless, that "to become the advocate of the rule . . . might be the ultimate form and refinement in which noblemindedness reveals itself on earth." See *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §55, p. 117.

66. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 156.

67. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche. . . , op. cit.*, p. 97. See also Dannhauser, "Friedrich Nietzsche," *op. cit.*, p. 847.

68. Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §865, p. 589.

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life, tremendous." It is thus the "incurably mediocre" and their morality that are surest to survive.[69] A Dionysian observer might rejoice over the will to life's inexhaustibility in the very sacrifice of its highest types.[70]

Moreover, there need not be anything appealing about great souls as perceived by others. From a less elevated perspective, their strict discipline and harsh self-legislation will appear terrible as often as magnificent.[71] As Simmel's discussion of the nobility illustrates, nobles tend to be set apart — not just in Nietzsche's thought, but sociologically and historically as well — by their duties and the special hardships of their situation as much as by their special rights and privileges.[72] It has not been unusual for the nobility to be subjected to exceptional burdens and severe sacrifices, rather than coveted advantages. Thus, the Brahman, whom Nietzsche identifies as a particularly noble type, leads a life of "such unbearable harshness, such constriction by forms and rules and mortifications and limitations, that there would probably have been extraordinarily few Europeans who would have wanted even the unsurpassed rights of the Brahman priest at such a price."[73] The most powerful of all, the Brahman, is also the least free, requiring every moment of his life to be fixed by a law, since each such moment is unconditionally important.[74]

Far from freeing higher men from constraint, Nietzsche expects the demands of a genuine aristocrat's self-imposed laws to become the more unsparing the higher he rises above the common run of mankind: "Your nobility should be obedience. Your very commanding should be an obeying."[75] Never absolved of their eternally recurring responsibilities, higher

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69. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §62, p. 74; § 262, p. 212; and §276, p. 223. Thus "the corruption, the ruination of the higher men, of the souls of a stranger type, is the rule." *Ibid.*, §269, p. 218. See also Glenn, "Nietzsche's Napoleon," *op. cit.*, p. 157: "The labyrinthine character of the higher man's soul is fraught with danger, and failure is always but a small step away."

70. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

71. See Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §960, pp. 640-641, where Nietzsche might be understood as invoking a new, *monstrous* aristocracy.

72. Georg Simmel, "The Nobility," in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. by Donald N. Levine, tr. by Richard P. Albares (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 199-213.

73. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, *op. cit.*, §21-22, pp. 588-590.

74. Simmel, "The Nobility," *op. cit.*, pp. 201-202.

75. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 160. As Karl Jaspers put it, "Nietzsche attacks morality . . . not in order to remove men's chains but rather to force men, under a heavier burden, to attain to a higher rank." See Karl Jaspers, "Man as His Own Creator," in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, Vol. III, ed. Daniel W. Conway (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 95.

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men carry the entire world on their shoulders — and do so as a matter of destiny.[76] All the while, they are least dependent and needful: noble in Simmel's sense precisely in their independent creative power, on the one hand, and in their acceptance of the profoundest hardships, on the other. At the height of Nietzsche's rank of order stands the "self-exalting individual being" that Simmel describes, the noble individual existence "that rests upon itself, that takes responsibility for and joy in itself" — but which at the same time remains always an elaboration and affirmation of the group that gave birth to it.[77]

It is tension and struggle, then, that line the path to greatness. Noble is he who can withstand suffering, and sustain "that tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strengths."[78] Instead of shrinking from suffering, great souls would "rather have it higher and worse than ever."[79] As Leo Strauss has pointed out, Nietzsche expects his new men not merely to take suffering for granted, but actually to *will* it; for those "who concern him," Nietzsche wishes "suffering, loneliness, sickness, abuse, humiliation."[80] If noble men lack pity, this is first and foremost toward themselves. The noble individual's duty, the correlate of his right, is directed primarily upon himself: before any ordinary human interests are sacrificed to these nobles, they must first

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76. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §288, p. 228. See also *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §341, pp. 273-74, where Nietzsche describes eternal recurrence as conferring "the greatest weight" on man's actions — and yet one that those best disposed towards themselves and to life crave most fervently, as the ultimate confirmation and seal on their actions. Simmel, too, emphasizes the enormous responsibility that Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence confers, making every action essential by a universalizing effect, not unlike Kant's categorical imperative. Simmel, "The Morality. . . ," *op. cit.*, pp. 312 and 317.

77. Simmel, "The Nobility," *op. cit.*, pp. 209 and 212-213.

78. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §225, p. 154. It is central to Nietzsche's thought that happiness and unhappiness must be considered together, like "sisters and even twins" that either grow or remain small together. See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §338, p. 270. This is also why he maintains that "the strongest and most evil spirits" — the "great *pain bringers* of humanity" — have done the most to advance mankind: "One holds that what is called good preserves the species, while what is called evil harms the species. In truth, however, the evil instincts are expedient, species-preserving, and indispensable to as high a degree as the good ones." *Ibid.*, §4, p. 79; §318, p. 253.

79. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §225, p. 153; and §229, p. 158.

80. Strauss, "Note. . ." *op. cit.*, p. 338; Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §910, p. 613. Nietzsche suggests that "it almost determines the order of rank how profoundly human beings can suffer." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §270, p. 220.

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eradicate everything commonplace within *themselves*.[81]

Considering that the prize of greatness is paid out largely in the currency of suffering, rather than in the comfortable privileges that lesser souls might expect, its exclusiveness may raise fewer problems than one might think. According to Nietzsche, the distinctions conferred on higher men are unbearable for anyone not destined for them: "Let us not underestimate the privileges of the mediocre. As one climbs higher, life becomes ever harder; the coldness increases, responsibility increases." The most worthy would rule, after all, not because they want to but by virtue of their very being.[82] Since the truly superior individual is distinguished by his self-sufficient vigor and independence, any social recognition should be at best irrelevant to his flourishing.[83] Again, if higher types become fixed and strong through their struggles with adversity, any distinctions conferred on presumptive higher men would threaten to undermine, rather than to bolster their claims to that status. It comes as no surprise, then, that so-called "great men" are regularly "pieces of wretched minor fiction" and that "in the world of historical values, counterfeit rules." Genuine greatness is recognized last, if at all: "The light of the remotest stars comes last to men: and until it has arrived man denies that there are stars there."[84]

As reprehensible as the actions of noble individuals may seem to their inferiors, such impressions reveal the latter's inability to appreciate fully the

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81. See Josiah Royce, "*The Will to Power* and the *Übermensch*," in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, Vol. III, ed. by Daniel W. Conway (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 271- 272. As Kaufmann puts it in *Nietzsche. . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 219, greatness consists much more in conquering oneself than in conquering others. See also Simmel, "The Morality," *op. cit.*, p. 305. Moreover, to count one's duties as one's privileges is as much a basic feature of nobility as the reverse. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §272, p. 221; Schacht, *Nietzsche*, *op. cit.*, p. 472. See also Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §872, pp. 594-595: "The rights that a man may claim are relative to the duties he will face, to the tasks that he feels up to."

82. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, *op. cit.*, §57, p. 646. Nietzsche suggests that the duties of the great will occasion at least as much gnashing of teeth as they do "dancing in their chains and between their swords." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §226, p. 154. See also the "profound thinker's" sentiment at §290 (p. 229): "Alas, why do *you* want to have as hard a time as I did?"

83. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §29, p. 41; and §206, p. 125. When Nietzsche endorses deviants, "who are so frequently the inventive and fruitful ones," he recognizes that societies regularly sacrifice them. See Friedrich Nietzsche, "From *The Dawn*," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1982), §164, p. 81.

84. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §226. p. 155; §262, p. 210; §269, p. 218; and §285, p. 227.

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laws by which the former govern themselves. The "evils" perpetrated by higher men are of a characteristically innocent kind, their presuppositions such that ordinarily valuations are simply inapplicable.[85] So alien is genuine greatness to most human beings that the overman would frighten many by his very kindness.[86] But this should not distract from how constrained the great individual will be in his interaction with inferiors — not as a matter of anyone's claims, but as a result of his own necessary character.

While Nietzsche insists that higher men have obligations to none but their peers, and in principle may behave as they please toward those of a lower rank, their privileges are owed to their abundant strength, vitality, and ability.[87] It would be the mark of pettiness, however, to act ungenerously or with wanton cruelty toward one's inferiors, i.e., the opposite of the bounteous vigor that distinguishes the great. Thus, noble human beings, "prompted by an urge begotten by excess of power," will be gentle to the sick, will help and attract the weak and unfortunate — always without calculation.[88] By Nietzsche's account, "It is nobler to declare oneself wrong than to insist on being right — especially when one is right." Only one must be strong enough for it. The most venerable men are also the most cheerful; they are tolerant and kind, philanthropic in the truest sense, not from weakness, but from strength.[89] Though it is better to avow one's hatred and envy openly than to disguise it and be ashamed, far better still to rise above such emotions.[90]

It would be unworthy of a profound spirit to consider mediocrity objectionable, and there may be greatness in not shrinking even from the most unworthy. Since the exception requires a rule, mediocrity must exist for excellence to be attained, and the choicest human beings will treat the

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85. Dannhauser, "Friedrich Nietzsche," *op. cit.*, p. 836.

86. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 256.

87. Compare St. Augustine's understanding of godlike creativity: "You created, not because you had need, but out of the abundance of your own goodness." St. Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), book XIII, §4, p. 313.

88. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §260, pp. 205-206; §293, p. 230; and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 145. Abbey and Appel's insistence that Nietzsche's interest lies only with the well-being of a few, whatever it may cost the majority, is as true in principle as it is misleading in practice. See Abbey and Appel, "Nietzsche and the Will to Politics," *op. cit.*, p. 106. As a matter of right, their inferiors have nothing to claim from Nietzsche's "higher men," and it is also true that their "not asking after the price" defines these individuals. At the same time, however, Nietzsche expects the common run of mankind to do well by the lead of their superiors.

89. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 180; *Twilight of the Idols*, *op. cit.*, p. 554; *The Antichrist*, *op. cit.*, §57, p. 646; and *Ecce Homo*, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

90. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 159.

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mediocre more tenderly than themselves and their peers.[91] In general, higher individuals will be more courteous, more sympathetic, more generous and forgiving than their inferiors — engaging others with a compassion that is not a disguised form of fear and self-loathing, as pity is, but an expression of overflowing life and strength.[92] If there is any hope of real neighborly love in the world, it will have to be grounded in just such strength, on a compassion that celebrates life, rather than a pity that diminishes man. Among the weak, meanwhile, "love of the neighbor" will always remain subordinate to fear, "the mother of morals." Where pity is preached, it is invariably accompanied by the "hoarse, groaning, genuine sound of self-contempt": only among those strong enough "to shrug off what eats deep into others" is a genuine love of one's neighbor possible, if it is possible at all.[93]

While it would be going too far to suggest that Nietzsche's highest men emerge "Christ-like" from their interactions with their inferiors, he does invite such inferences when he characterizes the overman as "the Roman Caesar with Christ's soul."[94] To be sure, Nietzsche often casts his heroes in the garb of the warrior: "Brave, unconcerned, mocking, violent — thus wisdom wants us: she is a woman and always loves only a warrior." Nietzsche also anticipated, however, that the lioness Wisdom "might learn to roar more tenderly."[95] As Roberts puts it, the threads of thanksgiving, reverence, and love woven into the fabric of Nietzsche's writing are

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91. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, *op. cit.*, §57, p. 647; *Twilight of the Idols*, *op. cit.*, p. 551. See also *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §892-893, pp. 605-606: "How could one be permitted to spoil their mediocrity for the mediocre! I am doing, as one can see, the opposite. . . . Hatred of mediocrity is not worthy of a philosopher. . . . Precisely because he is the exception, he is obliged to defend the rule, to preserve the good spirits of everything middling."

92. Thus, Nietzsche counsels noble individuals "to choose for company that impish and cheerful vice, courtesy" and includes sympathy among a list of key virtues, alongside courage, insight, and solitude. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §284, p. 226. In his *Dawn*, the four cardinal virtues include not only honesty and courage, but also unfailing politeness and "generosity towards the vanquished" (including, presumably, the powerless in general). Nietzsche, *The Dawn*, *op. cit.*, §556, p. 91.

93. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, §201, p. 113; §222, p. 150; §225, p. 153; and *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part I, §11, p. 39. Nietzsche's vision of a bolder, more persevering, simpler, gayer, i.e., higher type of man is predicated, after all, on the sharing of joy, rather than suffering. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §338, p. 271.

94. Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, *op. cit.*, §983, p. 652. Jaspers marvels at the "astonishing fact" that Nietzsche "stopped short before the figure of Jesus," and argues that "Nietzsche saw in Jesus the anticipation of his own idea of what is more than morality." See Jaspers, "Man as His Own Creator," *op. cit.*, pp. 97, p.113.

95. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 153; Part II, p. 197.

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slender, but brilliant, and to disregard them is to distort his thought.[96]

Some of Nietzsche's most powerful passages celebrate gracefulness among the mighty: "When power becomes gracious and descends into the visible — such descent I call beauty. And there is nobody from whom I want beauty as much as from you who are powerful: let your kindness be your final self-conquest. . . . You shall strive after the virtue of the column: it grows more and more beautiful and gentle, but internally harder and more enduring, as it ascends."[97] It is those who learn to exercise their power gracefully whose souls will be made to "shudder with godlike desires."[98] While greatness requires that one also find within oneself the strength to inflict pain, Nietzsche's ideal is ultimately one of "human, superhuman well-being and benevolence."[99] It is in this vein that Nietzsche anticipates a "new nobility," heir with a sense of obligation to all past nobility, that would discover an unprecedented happiness — "the happiness of a god full of power and love" — in a feeling of humaneness.[100]

For Nietzsche, the inclination to hurt others gratuitously indicates that one is still lacking in power:[101] "Learning better to feel joy, we learn best not to hurt others or to plan hurt for them."[102] Where one can no longer love, Zarathustra teaches, "there one should pass by," rather than lash out.[103] In the end, the highest consciousness and privilege of power is

96. Roberts stresses the "immense value" that Nietzsche attaches to giving — out of fullness, gratitude, and overflowing love. According to Roberts, Nietzsche discovers true power not in any "violent explosion of dominating wil," but in just such giving: "It is not too much of a stretch to find here in Nietzsche a version of the Augustinian ethic: 'Love, and do what you will'." Roberts, *Contesting Spirit*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 195-96. See also Clegg, "Life in the Shadow of Christ," *op. cit.*, p. 170: "Nietzsche's theology is, of course, a naturalized version of Augustinian doctrine." Where Nietzsche cautions against giving, it is out of concern for the recipient. See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part II, p. 195: "[T]his is what is the hardest: to close the open hand because one loves, and to keep a sense of shame as a giver."

97. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 230. It is only in this narrow sense that "what was gentlest in you must still become the hardest." *Ibid.*, Part III, p. 265.

98. *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 231. This passage should not be taken as a repudiation of the darker positions Nietzsche embraces elsewhere: he stresses that he does not mean to deny the need for evil. Because he deems the highest men capable of evil, he demands good from them.

99. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, §28, p. 101; §325, p. 255; and §382, p. 347. Those who matter most to Nietzsche, the heroic, are also "the great *pain bringers* of humanity, those few or rare human beings who need the very same apology that pain itself needs — and truly, one should not deny it to them." *Ibid.*, §292, p. 235 and §318, p. 253.

100. *Ibid.*, §337, pp. 268-69. See also §345, p. 283: "All great problems demand *great love*, and of that only strong, round, secure spirits who have a firm grip on themselves are capable."

101. *Ibid.*, §13, p. 87.

102. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 200.

103. *Ibid.*, Part III, p. 290.

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attained in the "noblest luxury" of mercy, when one lets go unpunished those who have done one harm. "What are my parasites to me?" the strongest individuals or societies might say, "May they live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!"[104] The most courageous thinker, Nietzsche concludes, would dare to judge a society's health and power by the number of parasites it can support, not the number of aristocrats in its midst.[105]

104. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *op. cit.*, Part II, §10, pp. 72-73. See also *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 212: "Mistrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful." And Part I, p. 181: "Would that you might invent for me the justice that acquits everyone, except him that judges!"

105. Nietzsche, *The Dawn*, *op. cit.*, §202, p. 88. See also *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, Part III, p. 321.

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Specters of the Uncanny: The Return of the Repressed

Saul Newman

Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* detected "hauntological" elements not only in Marx' thinking, but also in that of his philosophical opponent, Max Stirner. Both were shown to be engaged in a "ghost hunt" for the specters of idealism that alienated modern consciousness. Crucial to this account is the notion of the uncanny — the strange, terrifying effect resulting when something familiar becomes strange. Derrida, however, neglects the Freudian meaning of the uncanny as a "return of the repressed." Consequently, its radical implications are lost. This logic of the uncanny, as a return of the repressed, is fundamental to both Marx' and Stirner's critique of the ideological gap that separates the subject from the objective world. Despite Stirner's and Marx' attempts to overcome this logic, they nevertheless rely on it to prefigure a radical political subjectivity. This implies a political dimension of disidentification, which allows the constitution of contingent and non-essentialist political identities.

"Es Spukt"

Even though Derrida claims that an alternate title for the book might have been *Marx, the Uncanny*, he does not deal with the concept of the uncanny, as derived from Freud, in any great depth, thus robbing it of its impact.[1] Derrida argues that there is a hauntological dimension in Marx' thinking — a spectral counter-ontology that Marx tries to eschew, but

1. In his critique of *Specters of Marx*, John Fletcher argues that Derrida misinterprets the concept of the uncanny. See John Fletcher, "Marx the Uncanny? Ghosts and their Relation to the Mode of Production," in *Radical Philosophy* 75 (Jan./Feb. 1996), pp. 31-37.

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which reasserts itself in this very attempt to exorcise it. Thus, Marx cannot refute Stirner without relying on the very specters that he has tried to exorcise from his own thought.

Derrida uses the example of Hamlet's father's ghost returning to haunt the troubled young prince to characterize this spectral dimension in the Marxian universe. Marx' chief concern is seen to be that "time is out of joint," that the world is somehow characterized by a fundamental dislocation, an inconsistency in the structure of representation. Moreover, Derrida takes issue with Freud's insistence that the ghost in Hamlet is not uncanny. Freud, however, makes it clear that the apparitions in Shakespeare's plays, including *Hamlet*, while they might be frightening, are not examples of the uncanny. This is because they appear in the context of fiction, and therefore do not provoke feelings of uncertainty that characterize the uncanny.[2] In other words, the uncanny is something that happens in real life.

Moreover, Derrida equates Freud's uncanny with ghosts, apparitions and haunting — *es spukt*: "it spooks."[3] He suggests that Freud's discussion of the uncanny may have begun with, and indeed presupposed this very notion of *es spukt*. While the logic of haunting is important here, Derrida's formulation should be turned around. Rather than the logic of the uncanny presupposing a hauntology, i.e., a certain spectral dimension, it is actually presupposed by it: it is the uncanny that produces terrifying and haunting spectral effects. In other words, the uncanny cannot be reduced to a logic of haunting, but emerges from something entirely different: the "return of the repressed."

The Freudian Uncanny

Freud sees the uncanny as pertaining to what is frightening, arousing horror and dread. This fear is provoked by the familiar or homely becoming somehow unfamiliar or strange. What is interesting is the way that the different variations on the meaning of homely eventually slide into their opposite meaning of unfamiliar. Through the different meanings that Freud explores, there is a gradual progression toward that which is secretive and strange. Thus, homely becomes its opposite — the uncanny. In this way, the uncanny is related to what is familiar; it is something that

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2. Sigmund Freud, "The "Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17: *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works,* tr. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 219-252.

3. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, tr. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 173.

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appears in the form of the familiar, yet is somehow strange.

Freud relates the notion of the uncanny to the story of "The Sand-Man" in Hoffmann's *Nachtstucken*. The sand-man is a dreaded character in a children's tale — a figure who comes in the dead of night and tears out the eyes of children. The young Nathaniel in the story sees the sand-man return throughout his life in the form of the odious lawyer Coppelius, whom Nathaniel relates to the death of his father, eventually leading to madness and suicide. Freud detects several instances of the uncanny in this tale. First, there is the link between the anxiety of having one's eyes put out and the castration complex in childhood. Second, and more importantly, there is the question of the uncanniness of the double: in the story, Nathaniel falls in love with an uncannily life-like doll, Olympia, and a strongly uncanny feeling is provoked by the uncertainty as to whether the doll is living or inanimate. Freud argues that the creation of the double was originally a form of early childhood ego defence, which has now become something horrifying.[4] Thus, the uncanny involves a notion of *repetition* — of the returning of the same, but this time in a way that is strange and different. According to Freud, it is similar to the eerie feeling one gets when one is lost, and one keeps returning to the same place despite one's attempts to elude it. Other coincidences, involving an unexplained return to some entirely arbitrary object, place, or number are all instances of the uncanny.

From this, Freud develops a definition of the uncanny as something familiar, something "old — established in the mind," which has become alienated through repression.[5] The uncanny only emerges as a return of the repressed.[6] It is not something different, but always the return of the same: it is frightening, because of its familiarity; because it is the same, yet acquires the nature of something different and alien through repression.

This idea of the uncanny as a "return of the repressed" is crucial for politics understood as the attempt to construct something new, coupled with something old. Thus, radical politics is always haunted by the ghosts of the past — revolutionary traditions which are dead, yet remain unburied, which have been repressed, yet insist on returning in uncannily familiar forms. The uncanny may also be characteristic of a certain conservatism in

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4. Freud, "The "Uncanny'," *op. cit.*, p. 236: "The 'double' has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons."

5. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

6. Freud explains this repression: "an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed." *Ibid.*, p. 249.

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politics — the fact that every revolution is somehow a return to the old order, to the old forms of power, which return at the very instance where they were supposed to be overthrown. The uncanny is therefore characterized by a fundamental ambiguity. Like the uncertainty which always accompanies Freud's uncanny, the political uncanny is always undecidable. Its effects are unpredictable. In order to understand the ambiguous operation of the "return of the repressed" in politics, it helps to turn to Stirner and his critique of the uncanny specters of Enlightenment humanism.

Uncanny "Spooks": Stirner's Fear of Ghosts

The contemporary of Marx and Feuerbach, Stirner was troubled by specters. Modern consciousness, he argued, was haunted by spooks: fixed ideas, metaphysical abstractions like human essence, rationality and morality, which have been raised to the absolute level of the sacred. Fixed ideas are constructs that govern thought — discursively closed, absolute paradigms that deny difference and the plurality of existence. They are generalities which speak for individuals, thereby alienating them and denying their individuality. Modern man, Stirner argued, is surrounded and alienated by this ghostly world of fixed ideas: "A *ghostly* world is everywhere. Everything that appears is only the phantasm of an indwelling spirit, a ghostly apparition; the world is only a world of appearances, behind which the spirit walks."[7]

What is this spirit dwelling behind the material world, turning everything into a representation of something more fundamental? For Stirner, it is essence — the conviction that humanity must have an essence that exceeds and reifies it. This is what alienates individuals. Human essence is held as a sacred ideal that they must live up to, thus dividing individuals between their concrete and idealized selves. Sacred ideals like morality and rationality function as ideological specters that subsume individuals who aspire to these ideals can never attain. Thus, this spectral world of essence and the sacred is profoundly oppressive and alienating.

For Stirner, this strange world of apparitions is uncanny.[8] It is not just that the whole world is haunted — it has become uncanny. It is literally *alive* with specters. The sacredness of the world is uncanny: "In everything sacred there lies something 'uncanny,' that is strange, such as we are not

7. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own,* ed. by David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 36.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 36: "Yes the whole world is haunted! Only *is* haunted? Indeed, it itself 'walks,' it is uncanny through and through."

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quite familiar and at home in."[9] What is this unease that Stirner feels, this unfamiliarity that lies in the familiar? There is something strange about the world — it resembles something else, something repressed and long forgotten. It is as if the world has become haunted by a strange double of itself. Something has returned from the past, something unfamiliar and disconcerting, yet strangely familiar. These apparitions are the remnants of Christianity that have returned in a new guise: human essence. The same specters of religious mystification have returned in the form of Enlightenment rationality and humanism, i.e., the very logic that was supposed to dispel them. The specters of humanism are uncanny, because they are simply the return of a repressed Christian idealism.

The "Religious Insurrection"

Feuerbach applied the notion of alienation to religion. Accordingly, religion is alienating, because it requires that man abdicate his own powers by projecting them onto an abstract God beyond his grasp. In doing so, man displaces his essential self, leaving him alienated and debased: an empty vessel of sinfulness, prostrated before an omnipotent God.[10] For Feuerbach, the attributes of God is really only the attributes of man as species being. God is an illusion — a hypostatization of man. While man should be the single criterion for truth, love, and virtue, these characteristics are the property of an abstract being who remains permanently out of his grasp.

Stirner contends that in claiming that the qualities attributed to God are really the essential qualities of man, Feuerbach has turned man into an almighty being. Feuerbach sees will, love, and thought as essential human qualities, and wants to restore them to him. Thus, man becomes the ultimate expression of love, knowledge, will, and goodness. He becomes almighty, sacred, perfect, infinite; in short, man becomes God.[11] Thus, Feuerbach articulates the Enlightenment humanist project of restoring man to his rightful place at the center of the universe, of making the *human the divine, the finite infinite.*

Stirner argues that by seeking the sacred in human essence, by positing

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
10. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 27-28.
11. Stirner, *op. cit.*, p. 34; "The supreme being is indeed the essence of man, but, just because it is his *essence* and not he himself, it remains quite immaterial whether we see it outside him and view it as 'God,' or find it in him and call it 'essence of man' or 'man.' I am neither God nor *man*, neither the supreme essence nor my essence, and therefore it is all one in the main whether I think of the essence as in me or outside me."

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an essential man and attributing to him certain qualities that had hitherto been attributed to God, Feuerbach merely reintroduced religious alienation. By making certain characteristics essential to man, Feuerbach alienated those who do not have them. So man becomes like God, and just as man was debased under God, so individuals are alienated and debased by this perfect being, man. Feuerbach has not overthrown religious authority — he has merely installed man within it, reversing the order of subject and predicate. For Stirner, man is just as oppressive, if not more so, than God.[12] Feuerbach is the high priest of a new religion — humanism: "The human *religion* is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion."[13] Humanist man is a specter that desecrates individual particularity by comparing individuals to an ideal which is not of their own creation. Individuals becomes interpellated by this specter; their subjectivity is constructed around an illusory essence.

That is why the specter of human essence is so uncanny: so unfamiliar, yet familiar. It is this figure of God, only in a human form. In the humanist paradigm, religious alienation has been replaced by rational humanism; God has been replaced by man, and yet the repressed has returned in the form of its replacement. Rationality and morality have become the new forms of religious fanaticism: "Moral faith is as fanatical as religious faith!"[14] This religious essence is no longer external, but internal. It is not merely that man is haunted. Rather, man has become the ghost: "Henceforth man no longer, in typical cases, shudders at ghosts outside him, but at himself; he is terrified at himself."[15] Man has thus become a kind of uncanny double of himself, an embodiment of both God and the individual. For Stirner, the Freudian nightmare — that the "gods turned into demons after the collapse of their religion" — has been realized by the logic of Enlightenment humanism.

For Stirner, humanism is uncanny, because it represents the return of the repressed — the return of old forms of alienation in the very attempt to overcome them. This uncanniness is embodied in political ideologies that Stirner sees as linked to humanist rationalism. Thus, liberalism is the political expression of humanist alienation. While liberalism is an ideology of

12. Just as God was a power that subjugated the individual, now it is man and, as Stirner says, "'Man' is the God of today, and fear of man has taken the place of the old fear of God." *Ibid.*, p. 165.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

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rights and freedoms, a rejection of tyranny and religious obscurantism, it is still a return to political domination in a new form. This critique of liberalism emerges in a *counter-dialectic*, whose purpose is to challenge the dominant Hegelian dialectic. While the Hegelian dialectic culminates in human freedom, Stirner's counter-dialectic, which charts the development of humanity in relation to corresponding political institutions, ends with the complete domination of the individual. Stirner explores three politico-ideological paradigms, which he sees as different forms of liberalism. In its first form — political liberalism — political liberty merely means that the state is free, in the same way that religious liberty means that religion is free.[16] In other words, individual liberties ostensibly enshrined in liberalism are restricted within a certain political discourse regulated by the state. In political liberalism, the individual has been freed from arbitrary rule. Power is now regulated by laws and rational rules, allowing individuals unrestricted access to the state. This, however, has only entrenched the state's power over individuals. In some respects, this may be likened to Marx' critique of the politics of religious emancipation. For Marx, freedom of religion has only meant that religion is free to further entrench its hold over people.[17] Similarly for Stirner, political freedom has only meant that the state has more freedom to further subjugate individuals.

Differences between Stirner and Marx become more apparent in Stirner's account of the second form of liberal ideology: social liberalism or *socialism*, which comes about as a rejection of a political liberalism perceived as too egoistic. Political liberalism, however, was not characterized by too much egoism, but by too little, and he sees the enforced equality of socialism as further oppression. In this paradigm, society becomes the new agency of domination. Since society is nothing more than an ideological construction — another uncanny apparition that alienates people — individuals have been once again subordinated to an abstract ideal. It is another return of a supreme being demanding absolute sacrifice.[18] Collective social identities are no less oppressive than the liberal state. The domination has merely been displaced from the state to society. This conflicts with Marx, for whom social collectivities are fundamental. For Stirner, however, the individual is not an essential part of society as Marx believed.

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
17. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1968), pp. 26-52.
18. Stirner, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

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Stirner then examines the third and final form of liberalism: humane liberalism, which is based on a critique of both political and social liberalism. For the humanist, these two liberalisms are still too egoistic. One should act for selfless reasons, purely on behalf of humanity and one's fellowman. But humanism is based on a notion of human essence Stirner considers illusory. It claims that everyone has an essential kernel of humanity that they must live up to. Thus, humanism is the final stage in both the liberation of man and the enslavement of the individual ego. The more man frees himself from the objective conditions that bind him, such as state and society, the more the individual ego is dominated. This is because concepts like man and human *essence* have conquered the individual's last bastion: his thoughts or opinions. Personal opinion becomes "general human opinion," and individual autonomy becomes effaced.[19] As a result, the Enlightenment fantasy of human liberation corresponds to the complete domination of the individual.

In his diagnosis of liberal ideology, Stirner tried to identify a logic of the uncanny pervading these different formulations. Each of these political forms represents a return of the repressed — a displacement from one kind of domination to another. That is why they are so strangely familiar or uncanny. The return of these specters has intensified alienation, deepening the gap between the individual and an objective world, which was supposed to have been freed from obfuscations, but has become even more incomprehensible and mystifying. Individuals have become even more alienated. The uncanny figure of man, the strange double that the individual no longer recognizes, is simply the return of the repressed Christian God.

Stirner and Marx

For Stirner, then, there is always an ideological gap between individuals and the objective world, i.e., a fundamental dislocation that needs to be resolved. Humanism failed to overcome this dislocation: it has only further entrenched alienation. Marx also recognized this dislocation and sought its resolution. Like Stirner, Marx is also disconcerted by the uncanny. In light of Stirner's critique, Marx is forced to recognize the uncanny — the return of idealism — in his own thinking and, as if to exorcise it, locates it in Stirner's notion of the individual ego. Both attempts to deal with the uncanny have crucial political implications.

The relation between Stirner and Marx is paradoxical. It is generally

19. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

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acknowledged that Stirner's diagnosis of idealism had a dramatic effect on Marx: it forced him to confront the idealist presuppositions in his own early notions of human essence and species being he had inherited, to a large extent, from Feuerbach. Stirner's critique of Feuerbach had a revolutionary impact on the Young Hegelians, including Marx, who now came to question humanism. Moreover, it inspired criticism of Marx from some of his contemporaries, such as Arnold Ruge and Gustav Julius, who were both influenced by Stirner. They accused Marx of being indebted to the same Feuerbachian humanism and idealism that Stirner had linked to religious alienation.[20] Marx was troubled by Stirner's suggestion that the species being and related collective forms of society are tainted with Christian idealism. This disillusionment with humanism resulted in the vitriolic attack on Stirner, to which most of *The German Ideology* is devoted. This work is Marx' cathartic attempt to tar Stirner with the same idealist brush that he had been tarred, while, at the same time, to banish this specter from his own thought. What is important here is the question of the uncanny and how it functions in both Stirner's and Marx' thinking. Similar to Stirner's critique of Feuerbach, which unmasked the remnants of idealism in Marx' thinking, Marx' critique of Stirner unmasked the uncanny return of idealism in Stirner's notion of the individual ego.

Marx' Critique of Stirner

Written in 1845-6, *The German Ideology* is Marx' and Engels' critique of German idealist philosophy, which, they claim, is still caught within Hegelian categories. German philosophical criticism, from Strauss to Stirner, is confined to a critique of religious concepts that neglects the materiality of the world. While German ideologists seek to overcome religious idealism by condemning the dominance of abstract ideals, in so doing they only reaffirm the idealist concept of the world. In other words, in confining their critique to the impact of ideas on the world, they reaffirm the idealist inversion of reality. Rather than ideas determining the world, Marx and Engels argue that it is the material world that determines ideas.[21] The idealist inversion of the relation between ideas and the world — the belief that ideas can have a determining effect on consciousness and the

20. Indeed, it has been suggested that Stirner's critique of humanism brought about the "epistemological break" in Marx' thinking. See Henri Arvon, "Concerning Marx's 'Epistemological Break'," in *The Philosophical Forum* 8: "Feuerbach, Marx and the Left Hegelians," (1978), pp. 173-185.

21. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), p. 37.

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material world — is ideology at its most fundamental.

Stirner, they argue, is an ideologist *par excellence*. By seeing the world as haunted by ghostly abstractions (fixed ideas) that dominate modern consciousness, Stirner merely confirms the idealist illusion that ideas determine the world.[22] According to Marx and Engels, in seeing the world in terms of spirits, Stirner has neglected the material world. This is most apparent in Stirner's treatment of the state, where he argues that the state is an ideological abstraction, much like God, and only exists because individuals allow it to exist, because they abdicate to it their own authority, in the same way that God is created through an abdication and external projection of individual authority. What is more important than the institution of the state, for Stirner, is the ruling principle: the *idea* of the state that dominates man.[23] This unity and dominance exist mostly in the minds of its subjects. According to Stirner, the state's power is really based on the individual's power. The state continues to exist only because individuals have not recognized this power, because they humble themselves before authority. The state cannot function only through top-down repression, since this would expose its power in all its nakedness and brutality. Rather, it relies on people allowing it to dominate them. Stirner wants to show that ideology is not concerned only with economic or political questions, but is also rooted in psychological needs. The dominance of the state depends on one's own complicit desire for repression. According to Marx, however, this ignores the economic relations that constitute the state's material basis. Thus, according to Marx, Stirner's idealism absurdly allows the state to be dismissed by an act of wishful thinking.[24]

While Marx neglected the importance of political power by reducing it to economic relations, this issue raises important questions about subjectivity and resistance. Because political institutions like the state rely on a spectral ideological dimension, for Stirner the only way to effectively resist their domination is to rid oneself of the illusion of their power. The state's dominance is guaranteed by the willing acceptance of moral and

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22. In a relentless parody of Stirner, where he is caricatured as the religious thinker, "Saint Max," or as "Sancho," the deluded knight in Don Quixote who mistakes illusions for reality, Marx and Engels attempt to show that Stirner is caught in the world of his own illusions. They argue that he has merely conjured up the very apparitions that he sees as besetting the world: "Saint Max has so far done no more than give instruction in the rudiments of spirit — seeing, by regarding the ancient and modern world only as a 'pseudo-body of a spirit,' as a spectral phenomenon, and seeing in it only struggles of spirits." *Ibid.*, p. 160

23. Stirner, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

24. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," *op. cit.*, p. 379.

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rational absolutes, as well as the category of the sacred that legitimates its rule. Therefore, the state must be overcome as an idea before it can be overcome in reality. This is the only way to ensure that a new state does not spring up in place of the old. Therefore, while individuals are alienated and oppressed by ideological specters, they can resist this domination by rejecting the hold that fixed ideas have on them. Moreover, while individuals are alienated by the idea of human essence, an element of individuality escapes all this: the "ego," a continuous flow of self-creating flux. The ego is a concrete point of subjectivity that cannot be contained by the specters of essence, and provides a possible way out of alienation. Stirner's concern is to find a way to reconcile the world with the self. Individuals should therefore assert their egoistic qualities, and not be limited by fixed moral and rational categories. They should become "self conscious" egoists.[25] Stirner finds this extra-ideological point in an experience of subjectivity beyond essence: extreme egoism. Although this egoism has become repressed by moral and rational sanctions, by the expectation to conform to a fictional human essence, individuals, who have always been egoistic, should throw off the shackles of morality and self-sacrifice and become self-conscious egoists.

The Ego and Society

But does the ego escape ideology? According to Marx, the ego is merely the highest point of idealism; in order to escape the world of illusions and apparitions that he has conjured up, Stirner creates the ultimate apparition in the ego. For Marx, the ego is no more corporeal and no less abstract than human essence or fixed ideas.[26] According to Marx, the ego, which for Stirner is the corporeal subjectivity that escapes idealism, is an abstract specter that has no impact on the material world. Thus, Stirner's ego represents the uncanny return of idealism. Moreover, Stirner's distinction between ordinary and self-conscious egoists is illusory. This is because there is no contradiction between personal and general interests. Stirner's main criticism of socialism is that it sacrificed personal to general social interests. According to Marx, in socialism or communism, this is a false

25. See Kathy Ferguson, "Saint Max Revisited: A Reconsideration of Max Stirner," in *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 279.

26. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 259: "This 'Ego,' the end of historical construction, is no "corporeal' Ego, born of the flesh of man and woman . . . it is an 'Ego' born of the spirit from two categories, 'idealism' and 'realism,' a merely conceptual existence."

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opposition. Rather, the general interest is produced through the very private interest that Stirner sees as diagrammatically opposed to it,[27] i.e., rather than being in opposition to one another, general and private interest are inextricably bound. One flows from the other.

Initially, in a letter to Marx, Engels' responded enthusiastically to the *Ego and Its Own*. He wrote that any general cause sought by communists must first be an egoistic cause: ". . . it is equally from egoism that we are communists."[28] In light of Stirner's critique of self-sacrifice to ideals, Marx and Engels seem to have incorporated his egoistic stance into their notions of socialism. Moreover, is not Stirner's false division between the ordinary egoist and the "egoist in agreement with himself" mirrored in Marx' distinction between the proletariat "in itself" and the proletariat "for itself"? For Marx, the economic conditions of capitalism have created the proletariat as a class "in itself." But it is only when it becomes conscious of itself as a class, when it politicizes its struggle, that it becomes a class "for itself."[29] The same goes for Stirner, for whom the subject remains an "ordinary, everyday" egoist until he becomes conscious of his egoism and starts to politicize it, thus becoming an "egoist in agreement with himself."

This dispute between Stirner and Marx revolves around the notion of subjectivity and its relation to a community or collective identity. For Stirner, communities are abstract idealistic specters that have no essence and which imprison individuals. This is not to say that he rejects all notions of community; he believes that egoists can more effectively attain their ends in a "union of egoists."[30] Yet, any notion of community must flow from the individual egoist, rather than the other way round; it must be a deliberate construction. Only when individuals break away from fixed collective identities and essential notions of community do they become fully self-conscious egoists. In other words, the egoist's struggle becomes politicized only through a radical break with collectivities. For Marx, the individual only becomes a political subject within his class context — once proletarians consciously unite as a class. The individual has meaning only within a collective context. He presupposes society, rather than being

27. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

28. See R.K.W Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist Max Stirner* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 103.

29. Karl Marx, "The Coming Upheaval," in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, cited in *The Marx-Engels Reader, op. cit.*, p. 218.

30. Stirner, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

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presupposed by it. To propose an idea of individuality beyond social identities, as Stirner does, is to posit an abstract ideal, with no basis in material reality: it is the return of idealism. With Stirner, it is the opposite: the individual is the core reality and society is the idealist specter. Individuals have no real meaning outside collective entities.

These different articulations of the relation between individual and community are ultimately different ways of overcoming the gap in social representation. For Marx, the alienating lack in subjectivity is caused by the separation of the individual from a collective entity. For Stirner, abstractions like society deny individuality. Individuals can only realize their potentials and overcome alienation if they free themselves from social collectivities. Thus, any attempt to see individuals as inextricably bound with social life further alienates them from themselves. Moreover, both attempts to re-articulate the question of the individual *apropos* community have resulted in a return to idealism, or at least to a kind of essentialism. For Marx, Stirner's individual egoist as an entirely autonomous subjectivity is an idealist presupposition grounded in nothing. Marx' notion of a social collectivity, to which the individual is inextricably bound, is also an abstract ideal. Both articulations of the question of individuality and community cannot avoid the uncanny in the return of idealism.

A number of themes follow from this. First, the uncanny is seen in terms of an alienating gap separating the subjective and objective world. For Stirner, there is the uncanny return of religious idealism in the form of humanist notions of essence. Because it assumes the sacred, essentialism represents a new form of alienation — it spectralizes the objective world by projecting it beyond the reach of individuals. For Marx, this dislocation operates in a similar way, only this time idealism returns in the form of the egoistic separation of the individual from the social. Second, both approaches are ultimately flawed. Stirner tries to overcome alienation through a radically autonomous subjectivity. Yet, as Marx has shown, this falls into the trap of idealism. Marx sees the individual as being inextricably part of the social. But, as Stirner has shown, the social is an idealist specter with no basis in the material.

Disturbing the Social

What all of this suggests is that, while it is clear that the individual cannot be seen as entirely autonomous from society, it is also clear that the idea of society must be reconsidered. It cannot be founded on essentialist categories, or seen as governed by inexorable dialectical and historical

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processes. If one accepts Stirner's critique of essentialism, the idea that there is an internal logic whose unfolding determines the social must be rejected. This claim has been central to Enlightenment theory, including Marxism and liberalism. In classical liberalism, civil society is a natural commonality that provides the basis for political power, while at the same time keeping this power in check. In his critique of liberalism, however, Stirner has shown that a civil society that is autonomous from, and a check upon political power is false: civil society is merely a society dominated by the state. In classical Marxism, the generality of society is embodied in the particularity of the proletariat. For Marx, the proletariat's class position within capitalism is the "notorious crime of the whole of society."[31] For Stirner, it is precisely this notion of the "whole of society" that should be questioned: society has no essence. It is an ideological specter — a sacred body that must be rejected.

On the basis of Stirner's rejection of social essence, the social may be reformulated as follows. Society is not a complete identity, but a fractured and constitutively open one. It is governed by a radical dislocation, rather than an essential unity. Social identity is always incomplete. Thus, it is possible to derive from Stirner's rejection of social essence a new notion of politics as an open field of identifications. Stirner's rejection of essence is an attempt to overcome the uncanny. He believed that essence is a repressed religious idealism that has returned in different guises. But what if this argument is turned around? What if the logic of the uncanny is seen as not only fundamental to political identification, but crucial to a non-essentialist politics? What if, rather than limiting the openness of identity, as Stirner claims, the opposite is the case: that political identification relies on the uncanny that disrupts the socio-political field? For Stirner, the uncanny is a spectral dimension that alienates the individual from himself, i.e., there is a gap between the individual and the humanist ideal he is supposed to conform to. Stirner overcomes this by calling for the individual to become egoistic — to explore egoistic modes of experience and subjectivity. This injunction to become egoistic, however, invokes the very uncanny logic of dislocation that it is supposed to overcome. Becoming egoistic involves an identification with a certain mode of subjectivity that is not natural, i.e., a constitutive leap from the subjectivity of the ordinary egoist to the "egoist in agreement with himself." This leap is only possible

31. Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction," in Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), pp. 175-187.

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through the alienating split in subjectivity that derives from the uncanny and that Stirner seeks to abolish. The only way Stirner can overcome alienation is by positing the pure void of subjectivity created by alienation.[32] This nothingness at the heart of subjectivity — the non-essentialist void out of which a new egoism will emerge — is only possible through alienation; it is only possible through the split in subjectivity created by the uncanny. It is only through the drive to overcome alienation — the rift in subjectivity — that new forms of non-essentialist subjectivity, like egoism, are possible. Thus, rather than the uncanny imposing essentialist identities on the individual, it disrupts essences and allows the creation of new identities.

A similar argument can be made with respect to Marx. The same kind of "leap across the void" is implicit in Marx' notion of proletarian subjectification. The proletariat must go from being a class "in itself" to a class "for itself" — a self-conscious proletariat. That is the only way it can overcome alienation. However, this subjective void out of which proletarian consciousness emerges is only made possible by the dislocation of existing identities, i.e., the rift between the subjective and objective worlds created by the specters of the uncanny. In other words, for both Stirner and Marx, it is the uncanny that dislocates the subject, by creating a rift between him and the objective world, which now appears strange and unhomely. Both try to ground this uncanny dimension in a positive subjectivity: the egoist, for Stirner; the proletarian, for Marx. Because it involves a constitutive leap across a void from one mode of subjectivity to another, the act of political identification is only made possible by the uncanny.

Disidentification

For both Marx and Stirner, the uncanny is a disavowed, yet at the same time unavoidable dimension in political subjectification. Both are threatened by the uncanny. It is a spectral dimension that creates a rift between the subjective and objective world. The uncanny is seen in terms of an alienating logic that distorts reality, that makes things appear different and strange. Both try to ground this uncanny in a positive figure of subjectivity that is supposed to overcome alienation. Yet, this act of radical subjectification relies on the lack created by the uncanny. This means that the uncanny is an irreducible political dimension. It is crucial to political identification, which requires the subject to move beyond his ordinary, everyday identity to articulate a conscious political position:

32. He claims that: ". . . I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything." See Stirner, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

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egoist or proletarian. Indeed, politics is constituted by these acts of symbolization, which rely on a dislocation of identity.

So the uncanny is part of the dislocation of the political that is, at the same time, where new political identities are constituted. It is something made *unfamiliar* by the continual return of repressed symbolizations that disrupt contemporary political and ideological frameworks, allowing new political articulations and new identities. This unfamiliar disidentification may be likened to Freud's notion of the haunted house.[33] It is only when the individual finds himself in an unfamiliar place — when things do not seem quite right, that he undergoes the traumatic process of politicization. The individual's objective ideological world appears strange for the first time. He no longer feels at home.

The ghosts of the past — the repressed voices and lost dreams of radical movements — return to haunt current ideologies, unmasking their contingency. For Marx, contemporary political struggles were haunted by the ghostly conflicts of the past. The struggles between the "freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf" return from the past and find their expression in the struggles between bourgeois and proletariat.[34] Perhaps the proletariat can be seen as an example of the uncanny — the embodiment of previous struggles between oppressor and oppressed. In other words, the uncanny is the constitutive gap between the subject and the objective world of ideology. Both Stirner and Marx tried to close this gap, to reconcile the subjective and objective worlds. Yet, this gap is crucial. The reconciliation of the subjective and objective world is not the beginning of politics, but its end.

From this discussion of the uncanny in Stirner and Marx, a number of conclusions have emerged. First, the uncanny has been defined as the return of repressed specters of idealism that appear in the contemporary form of a gap in social representation. Second, both Stirner's and Marx' attempts to overcome this alienating lack — to ground the uncanny in positive political identifications — resulted in a return to essentialist and idealist presuppositions. Third, far from imposing a limit on political subjectification, the uncanny is its very condition. It thus provides a place of disidentification from which contingent political identities are formed. The uncanny is therefore an irreducible category in the logic of political identification.

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33. Freud, "The Uncanny," *op. cit.*, p. 241.

34. Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader, op. cit.*, pp. 473-474.

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The Bankruptcy of the Republican School

Luigi Marco Bassani

If "native Americans . . . developed the fundamental principles of freedom of speech and separation of powers in governments . . . [which] form the foundation of the United States Government,"[1] then perhaps all of American political history should be revised. The most important revisionist movement in the past forty years among historians of the American revolution, however, is associated with so-called classical or civic republicanism. This school's basic contention is that the ideas of Aristotle, Livy, and Tacitus, somewhat modernized via Machiavelli and Harrington, had a much greater impact on the revolutionary generation than Locke's thought. Thus, the American revolution is seen as the product of classical republicanism, owing little or nothing to natural law and natural rights traditions.

The republican school's attempt to present Anglo-American political ideas independently of the doctrine of natural rights is far from new. In general, historians do not believe what the founding fathers — in pamphlets, speeches, private correspondence, and public documents — often reiterated about the moral philosophy that led them to break with the British Empire. While these contemporary documents invariably mention Locke as the major source of colonial dogma, historians usually do not find them persuasive. Part of the problem is that sophisticated scholars can no longer believe in any system deriving its tenets from a precise idea of human nature and the limits of political order. Historians have been convinced by the arguments of Bentham, Marx, and countless others that nature does not prescribe anything, that men are free to remold their institutions at will. In

1. This is a congressional resolution that came before the House of Representatives in the Fall of 2001, quoted in Mark Steyn, "The Slayer Virus: The West's anti-Westernism," in *The New Criterion* (February 2002), p. 10.

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short, they hold that natural rights are nothing but fabrications. If they cannot accept such a doctrine, they are prone to project their own convictions onto the founding fathers. The latter are seen as men endowed with tremendous intellectual capacity, who must have seen the fallacies of natural rights doctrine. While there are innumerable histories of the Soviet revolution written by Marxists, and of the French revolution written by Jacobin sympathizers, few histories of the American revolution have been written by those sharing the revolutionaries' beliefs. Yet, the American revolution was the deed of men who sincerely believed in natural rights.

Natural Rights vs. Common Law: A Hopeless Dichotomy

The first reflections on the nature of the American revolution began early on, both in America and in Europe, especially as the other great "revolution" was taking place a few years later. In the early 1800s, the comparison between the French and the American revolutions became a favorite pastime for Euro-American intellectuals. One of the first of these efforts was the book written by Friedrich von Gentz (1764-1832), and translated by John Quincy Adams, who had been a young diplomat in Berlin.[2] During the next two centuries, Gentz's thesis became very popular. The French revolution was seen as the product of a fanatic zeal for natural rights, the "abstract natural rights of mankind," while the American one was viewed as a "conservative revolution." "The American revolution was from beginning to end . . . merely a defensive revolution." Forced on Americans by British inflexibility, it was "a revolution of necessity . . . America had contended ten years long, not against England, but against the Revolution" instigated by King George.[3]

From Gentz's work, a standard narrative developed: the colonists were compelled to break their ties with the mother country because they were claiming customary English rights denied them by their British rulers. This interpretation had very conservative implications: the Americans had been forced to break their ties with the British Empire in order to safeguard their juridical and cultural heritage. Gentz was clearly following Edmund Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* he had translated into German. Burke commented widely on what was to become

2. Originally published in two parts in April and May 1800 in *Historisches Journal* (Berlin), this work was immediately translated by John Quincy Adams as *The Origin and Principles of the American Revolution Compared with the Origin and Principles of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: Asbury Dickins, 1800), now reprinted in Russell Kirk, ed., *The French and American Revolutions Compared* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955).

3. Gentz, *The French and American Revolutions Compared*, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 and 56.

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the American revolution as the news reached London, and was sympathetic to it from the very beginning. This support was based on a "conservative" reading of the struggle. Britain was failing to come to terms with the colonies, because she was at the lowest point of her long love affair with liberty. On the contrary, Burke said that in the English colonies "the fierce spirit of liberty is stronger . . . than in any other people on earth." This is because they are Englishmen "not only devoted to liberty, but to liberty according to English ideas and English principles. Abstract liberty, like other mere abstractions, is not to be found [in the colonies]."[4]

John Philip Reid is one of those who argue that "the familiar platitudes about natural law" are nothing but "pet beliefs cherished by American historians."[5] Allegedly, what prompted the colonists to overthrow British rule was not a commitment to natural rights, but their absolute devotion to the constitutional principles of the British tradition. Far from having any significance for the political philosophy it expounded, the *Declaration of Independence* was but an indictment of King George, according to common law. The rights demanded in the *Declaration* were not the rights of mankind, but "English constitutional principles sanctioned by English constitutional history, and guaranteed by English common law."[6] Thus, the dissolution of the Empire, as far as Americans were concerned, was firmly based on common law.

It is surprising that anyone can entertain the idea that the British constitution included something like the right to withdraw from the British Empire, or the right to resist the authority of Parliament. The main argument, however, revolves around a single proposition: "The revolutionary controversy was concerned with positive constitutional rights, not abstract natural rights."[7] The colonial rebels wanted to be accepted as British citizens, and were actually fighting within the framework of the constitutional "positive" rights granted by British law. Thus, the goal of the American revolution was to preserve an "already existing social order."[8]

4. Edmund Burke, "Speech in Support of Resolutions for Conciliation with the American Colonies (March 22, 1775)," in *On the American Revolution* (1966), ed. by Elliot R. Barkan (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1972), p. 82.

5. John P. Reid, "The Irrelevance of the Declaration," in *Law in the American Revolution and the Revolution in the Law: A Collection of Review Essays on American Legal History*, ed. by Hendrick Hartog (New York: New York University Press, 1981), p. 47.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

7. John P. Reid, *Constitutional History of the American Revolution: The Authority of Rights* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 90.

8. Robert E. Brown, *Reinterpretation of the Formation of the Constitution* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1963), p. 21.

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This position also appealed to conservatives such as Russel Kirk, who wrote that: "the American Revolution was not an innovating upheaval, but a conservative restoration of colonial prerogatives."[9]

To contrapose common law and natural rights is misleading. There was no such conflict. Customary English laws were venerated in America mainly as a yardstick of what nature prescribed. While laws derived from nature or history may be seen as fundamentally opposed, in fact they have much in common: both deny that law can be totally estranged from the actual character of human beings and society, that it can be a simple volition of the sovereign will, be it a majority of citizens, an assembly, or a king. The Americans were following a venerable European tradition, going back to the Middle Ages, that equated common and natural law, customs and nature. Even in England, such views were not infrequent among jurists.[10]

It seems impossible to separate customary rights from those derived from nature. When James Otis stated, in one of the first revolutionary pamphlets, that "every British subject born on the continent of America or in any other of the British dominions is by the law of God and nature, by the common law, and by the act of Parliament . . . entitled to all the natural, essential, inherent and inseparable rights of our fellow subjects in Great Britain,"[11] he was asking that the British grant to his countrymen both their rights as British subjects *and* their natural rights as human beings. He was appealing at once to the authority of rights founded on reason and nature, and to the rights that had crystallized during the centuries in the body of common law. And the rights sanctioned by nature came first. According to the young John Adams, "the liberty, the unalienable, indefeasible rights of men, the honor and dignity of human nature, the grandeur and glory of the public, and the universal happiness of individuals,

9. Russel Kirk, *The Conservative Mind. From Burke to Eliot* [1953] (Chicago, Gateway Editions, 1986), p. 72.

10. In 1615, Sir John Davis (1569-1626) stated: "As the lawe of nature, which the Schoolmen call *Ius Commune*, and which is also *Ius non scriptum*, being written onely in the heart of man, is better then all the written lawes in the world to make men honest and happy in this life. . . . So the customary law of England, which we doe likewise call *Ius Commune*, as coming nearest to the lawe of Nature, which is the root and the touchstone of all good lawes, and which is also *Ius non scriptum*, and written onely in the memory of man . . . doth far excel our written lawes, namely our Statutes or Acts of Parliament. See John Davis, "A Preface Dedicatory," in *Le Primer Report des Cases et Matters en Ley* [1615] (London, 1628), quoted in Charles H. McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought in the West. From the Greeks to the End of the Middle Ages* [1932] (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 365.

11. James Otis, "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved" (1765), in *Pamphlets of the American Revolution (1750-1765)*, ed. by Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 444.

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were never so skillfully and successfully consulted as in that most excellent monument of human art, the common law of England."[12]

Thus, common law as it developed was validated by nature, and its authority rested ultimately on the fact that it pointed toward the appreciation of the rights of all mankind. For many revolutionaries who admired and even revered the traditional liberties of Englishmen, common law was nothing other than the history of natural law, a sort of natural history of liberty. After the revolution, liberty clearly had found a new home. As Jefferson wrote in 1787 about England: "The sun of her glory is fast descending to the horizon. Her philosophy has crossed the Channel, her freedom the Atlantic."[13]

Americans did not start the revolution because of their ideas about the constitutional, positive rights of Englishmen. Rather, it was their notion of rights — a notion undoubtedly influenced, though not exclusively, by the fact that they were British subjects — that shaped and gave meaning to the revolution as well as to the many constitutional endeavors that were part of the revolutionary process.

The moral doctrine of the founding fathers was rooted in "a cluster of ideas that has little or no forebear in history, and that has left an indelible mark on our civilization."[14] In America, "in the beginning it was not the word . . . in the beginning was the state of nature and the word was with the philosophers of natural rights."[15] Echoing Lord Acton, almost forty years ago Yehoshua Arieli described the triumph of natural law doctrines in terms that still command attention: "The revolutionary separation from the mother country involved a radical break with its own past, the transformation of English subjects into American citizens and of the rights of the Englishmen into the rights of nature. The . . . consciousness of English national traditions and rights, of the continuity of history and belonging, had to be reinterpreted in new terms which replaced the traditional element by concepts taken from the natural-rights philosophy."[16] Edward Erler

12. John Adams, quoted in Edward S. Corwin, *The "Higher Law" Background of American Constitutional Law* [1928-29] (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 24.

13. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* [1787], ed. by William Peden (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955,), p. 65.

14. Alessandro Passerin D'Entrèves, *La dottrina del diritto naturale* [1951] (Milan: Comunità, 1980), p. 65.

15. Walter Berns, "Religion and the Founding Principle," in *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic* [1977], ed. by Robert H. Horowitz (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1986), p. 217.

16. Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Naturalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 25-26.

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restated the same concept: "It was the change from historical prescription to natural rights that represents the radical core of the American revolution and the American Founding. It was not the rights of the Englishmen . . . that was the subject of the Declaration, but the rights of man derived, not indeed from any particular constitution or positive law, but from nature."[17]

The Republican Synthesis

In spite of all the doubts and reservations that historians have shared on the strict adherence of the founding fathers to natural law dogma, in the first part of the last century a consensus was forming at least on one thing, namely the paramount importance of John Locke for Americans. Carl Becker, analyzing the theoretical framework of the *Declaration of Independence*, concluded that Jefferson had added Lockean natural rights philosophy to the country's birth certificate.[18] According to Becker, "the lineage is direct, Jefferson copied Locke and Locke quoted Hooker."[19] During the 1950s, the "Lockean consensus" — a double accord: an agreement among historians on the ideological consensus of the revolutionary generation — reached its pinnacle in the well-known work of Louis Hartz, who stated: "Locke dominates American political thought, as no thinker anywhere dominates the political thought of a nation."[20]

In the past half century, this conventional wisdom has changed.[21] There has been such a general attack on Locke's influence that not only purges the whole generation of Founding Fathers of any Lockean influence, but does not allow any historical figure of importance to remain a Lockean, in spite of anything he might have written or said.

The case of Jefferson is paradigmatic. He thought highly of Locke. To him, Locke, Bacon, and Newton "were the greatest men that ever lived

17. Edward J. Erler, "The Great Fence to Liberty: The Right to Property in the American Founding," in *Liberty, Property, and the Foundations of the American Constitution*, ed. by Ellen Frankel Paul and Howard Dickman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 47.

18. Carl L. Becker, *The Declaration of Independence, a Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922).

19. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

20. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), p. 140.

21. For two articles that put into focus what was going on in American historiography, see Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, Vol. XXIX, No. 3 (1972), pp. 49-80, and "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2 (1982), pp. 334-356.

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without any exception."[22] He reiterated this thought some twenty years later in a recollection that sheds unfavorable light on Alexander Hamilton: "The room being hung around with a collection of the portraits of remarkable men, among them were those of Bacon, Newton and Locke, Hamilton asked me who they were. I told him they were my trinity of the three greatest men the world had ever produced, naming them. He paused for some time: 'the greatest man, said he, that ever lived, was Julius Caesar'."[23]

In a letter dated May, 30, 1790, Jefferson stated: "Locke's little book on Government, is perfect as far as it goes."[24] If this were not enough, at the age of thirty-three he drafted the *Declaration of Independence*, which, in spite of some recent interpretations,[25] is nothing but a Lockean manifesto. Yet, Garry Wills, Richard Matthews, and a cluster of other scholars[26] have devoted time and effort trying to prove that Jefferson was not a Lockean, that he believed property was not a natural right, and that the *Declaration* is a product of some communitarian version of the Scottish Enlightenment.

In any case, with few notable exceptions, in the past forty years academics have tried to present a revolutionary mind, more or less

22. Thomas Jefferson to John Trumball (January 18, 1789), in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by Julian P. Boyd, *et al.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), Vol. XIV, p. 561.

23. Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush (January 16, 1811), in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by A.A. Lipscomb and A.E. Bergh, 20 vols. (Washington D.C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904-1907), Vol. XIII, p. 4.

24. Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph (May 30, 1790), in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, *op. cit.*, Vol. XVI, p. 449.

25. See Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (New York: Doubleday, 1978). The proper title of this work should be *Inventing Jefferson (and Hutcheson)* as the author tries to argue that the Virginian was "enlightened" in his political thought by the authors of the Scottish Enlightenment, and totally ignorant of Locke's work (one wonders if there is anything one can be sure about, as the author claims that Jefferson had *not* read Locke's *Second Treatise*). After constructing a Jefferson who never existed, Wills goes on to build a totally deceptive Hutcheson, who supposedly influenced the *Declaration*'s ideas on property, natural rights, and moral philosophy in general. This book has been attacked with well deserved severity: see Ronald Hamowy, "Jefferson and the Scottish Enlightenment: A Critique of Garry Wills's *Inventing America*," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, Vol. XXXVI, No. 4 (1979), pp. 503-523, and K.S. Lynn, "Falsifying Jefferson," in *Commentary*, Vol. LXVI, No. 4 (1978), pp. 66-71.

26. See Garry Wills, *Inventing America*, *op. cit.*, and Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson. A Revisionist View* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1984). Here, Matthews contends that Jefferson was a fierce adversary of property rights and free markets, while envisioning a radical redistribution of wealth in the early republic. There is not an iota of evidence in Jefferson the thinker or Jefferson the politician to support such an extravagant interpretation. But by the time Matthews was writing, the forces of historiographical revisionism were at work through the "republican synthesis" and his view was not revisionist at all; rather, for a while, it became the orthodox interpretation.

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"debugged" of any sort of Lockean influence. As far as the whole revolutionary period is concerned, it has been the task of the republican school to challenge the long accepted notion of a Lockean influence on the colonists. The works of John Pocock, Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and Lance Banning, just to name the front-runners of this deep revisionist movement, have been a powerful challenge to what was considered to be the "the Myth of John Locke and the Obsession with Liberalism."[27] In the past forty years, these authors have developed an influential school revolving around the devaluation of any influence of classical liberalism, particularly of the Lockean inclination, on the men of 18th century America.

Interesting enough, while discounting the notion that the most important political thinker of the English-speaking world had an influence on the revolutionary generation in America, republican historians are more than ready to make use of theories drawn from a Viennese philosopher, an American anthropologist, and the all too fashionable Thomas Kuhn. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Clifford Geertz, and Kuhn compose the great triumvirate of authors whose theories on language, paradigm shift, and culture are allegedly required in order to understand the simple minds of the colonists.[28]

As far as the *pars contruens* is concerned, these scholars have modified the notion of "republicanism," transforming what was once considered to be merely a form of government (the counterpart of monarchy) into a dynamic ideology. Such an ideology was indeed so dynamic that the crafters of this "new tradition" found it virtually impossible to agree on its

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27. See J. G. A. Pocock, "The Myth of John Locke and the Obsession with Liberalism," in *John Locke*, papers read at a Clark Library Seminar (December 10, 1977), by J. G. A. Pocock and Richard Ashcraft (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1980). As far as the American founding is concerned, the school's major works are: Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); and Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion, Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

28. See Bernard Bailyn, "The Central Themes of the American Revolution: An Interpretation," in *Essays on the American Revolution*, ed. by Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1973); J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Gordon S. Wood, "Intellectual History and the Social Sciences," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, ed. by John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); Ronald G. Walters, "Sign of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians," in *Social Research*, Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (1980), pp. 537-556.

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main features. There are, in fact, almost as many variants of republicanism as there are historians. Pocock's republicanism is centered on the notion of self-fulfillment as political participation, while Wood's is built on the sacrifice of self to the common good. In Wood's reconstruction of America's dawn, there is no place for the individualistic tradition, since "ideally republicanism obliterated the individual."[29] Another variety of republicanism — soft republicanism — is Bailyn's view of the conflict between liberty and power. Bailyn never totally dismissed Locke as a prominent thinker in shaping the colonial mind; he simply put him off the center stage. He was, however, probably the first one to argue that "the language of classical antiquity" shaped the discourse of the founding era,[30] and "classical antiquity," in due time, became a simple catchphrase for republicanism. For years, the varieties of republicanism — especially Pocock's and Wood's — were not even on speaking terms with each other.[31]

Republican scholars maintain that this ideology shaped both the ancient and the modern world and, in particular, that it dominated the Florentine political universe of the 1500s, reaching England in the 1600s and America in the revolutionary and early republican era. The history of the colonists' intellectual influences had to be totally rethought as "an intellectual route from the Renaissance to the Revolution that bypassed Locke altogether."[32] The key modern figures of this novel interpretation are Machiavelli, Harrington and . . . Thomas Jefferson. In the 1970s, the most brilliant historian of the republican school, Pocock, wrote: "An effect of the recent research has been to display the American Revolution less as the first political act of revolutionary Enlightenment than as the last great act of the Renaissance."[33]

To be sure, the republican "discoverers" had, in point of fact, exposed a language of "corruption" and "virtue" in the revolutionary period that was at odds with much of natural rights discourse. Moreover, much of this political jargon went unnoticed in the works of previous generations of historians. But republican scholars have not confined themselves to uncovering an almost forgotten tradition of "civic virtue" and classical republicanism in American ideology, and presenting it as a problem. They went on to build a full-scale explanation of such a political discourse, and attempted to

29. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

30. Bailyn, *The Origins*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

31. See Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: the Career of a Concept," in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 1 (1992), p. 18.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 16. On the same page, this Pocockian lineage is called "exhilarating."

33. J. G. A. Pocock, "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century," in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. III, No. 1 (1972), p. 124.

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display the irrelevance of John Locke, both for England, for the colonies, and for the rest of the world.[34] As Steven Dworetz noted: "The fall of liberalism and the rise of republicanism in the historiography of the American Revolution — arguably the most stunning reversal in the history of political thought — . . . was begun with a hostile interpretation of Locke."[35] Or, as Joyce Appleby stated more bluntly: "Locke must be banished because he is offensive to the sensibilities cultivated by classical republicanism."[36]

Another piece of the story missing from the republican perspective is Christianity. According to republican historians, centuries of Christian thought had no effect on the American revolutionary generation. The political meaning of the peculiar Protestant thought that many held to be of vital importance in forming the climate leading to the revolution is dismissed. If Lockean liberalism is the primary target, the main collateral casualty is the relevance of Christianity for the Founding Fathers. One can readily sense a classical paradigm at work, as the republicans promote a return to pagan theory, to the exclusion of what became the religious faith of the West. The doctrine that man is a brute beast bereft of individual

34. This language can also be understood in a different way. Various works challenge the view that virtue was a uniquely republican notion. Thus, John P. Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) and James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," in *Journal of American History*, No. 74 (1987), pp. 11-16, argue persuasively that the colonists shared a belief in a rather Protestant and distinctively Lockean concept of virtue. Analyzing colonial political language, Jack Green finds that "the significance of the concept of civic virtue in early America may have been considerably inflated." See Jack P. Green, "The Concept of Virtue in Late Colonial British America," in *Virtue, Corruption, Self-Interest. Political Values in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Richard K. Matthews (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1994), p. 48. Pocock started prudently. In 1965, he wrote that: "It is clear that the textbook account of Augustan political thought as Locke *et praeterea nihil* badly needs revision." See J. G. A. Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, Vol. XXII, No. 3 (1965), p. 551. However, in the following decades he decided to go full length against this notion of "Locke *et praeterea nihil*," and his research program became so bold that in order to go along with his stunning scholarship one has to forget almost everything one has learned from other authors, especially the ones "trapped" by the Lockean myth. No doubt, he "has been the most insistent in repudiating Locke's influence on the entire century," according to Isaak Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism. Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 167. See also John H. Hexter, "Republic, Virtue, Liberty, and the Political Universe of J. G. A. Pocock," in *On Historians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 293-303.

35. Steven M. Dworetz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine, Locke Liberalism, and the American Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 12.

36. Joyce O. Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 133.

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rights that can be saved only by the state is in fact a reformulation of ancient political theories that were obliterated by Christianity.

Hannah Arendt anticipated many themes that became of paramount importance to republican scholars (public happiness, virtue, etc.). A peculiarly Arendtian notion of virtue is acknowledged by Pocock as of crucial importance for his own civic humanism.[37] Moreover, Arendt builds her notion of "public space" on some Jeffersonian reflections, thus aiming directly at the heart of the American founding. At the beginning of the chapter "Pursuit of happiness" in *On Revolution*, Arendt seems to recognize the obvious and the notorious: that for Jefferson and most of the Founding Fathers, happiness was in the private realm. She also refers to a famous letter in which the Virginian affirms that he seeks "for happiness in the lap and love of my family, in the society of my neighbors and my books, in the wholesome occupations of my farm and my affairs, in an interest or affection in every bud that opens, in every breath that blows around me, in an entire freedom of rest, of motion, of thought, owing account to myself alone of my hours and actions."[38]

But Arendt dismisses the sincerity of the claim. Such reflections "do not carry much weight," she feels, because "as far as Jefferson and the men of the American revolution are concerned . . . the truth of their experience rarely came out when they spoke in generalities."[39] According to Arendt, for American revolutionaries "public freedom consisted in having a share in public business, . . . [which] gave those who discharged [public duties] in public a feeling of happiness they could acquire nowhere else."[40] Drawing on a very free reading of Jefferson's famous letter of 1816 in which he expounds his ward system ideal, she reiterates the point about the public dimension of happiness. "The basic assumption of the ward system, *whether Jefferson knew it or not*, was that no one could be called happy without his share in public happiness, that no one could be called free without his experience in public freedom, and that no one could be called either happy or free without participating, and having a share, in public power."[41]

Republicanism's most important assumption is that the supreme political

37. See, J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, History, Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 44-48.

38. Thomas Jefferson to James Madison (June 9, 1793), in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, p. 119.

39. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963), pp. 125-126.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259 (italics added).

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end is the pursuit of the "public good," which in turn is defined almost always *ex negativo* as the opposite of the search for private interests. It follows that liberty is essentially the Florentine ideal of "*vivere civile*," and has nothing to do with the classical liberal definition of liberty in terms of non-interference of public authorities in the lives of individuals.[42] The republican thesis centers thus on a quite pre-modern view of man as a social animal, driven by social needs, "whose realization of self occurs only through participation in public life."[43] The "common good" is something totally different than the sum of all private goods, as Wood states nicely, if somewhat unpersuasively. "This common interest was not, as we might today think of it, simply the sum of consensus of the particular interests that made up the community. It was rather an entity in itself, prior to and distinct from the various private interests of groups and individual."[44]

For republicans, freedom is essentially "civic participation." The concept of liberty mostly in tune with republicanism is of course positive liberty. The republican historians grew very fond of Isaiah Berlin's categories and used them freely in their research. Thus, Pocock argues that "the republican vocabulary . . . articulated the positive conception of liberty: it contended that *homo*, the *animale politicum*, was so constituted that his nature was completed in a *vita activa* practiced in a *vivere civile*, and that *libertas* consisted in freedom from restraints upon the practice of such a life."[45]

However, according to republican historians, this is not a simple restoration of the liberty of the ancients, as Benjamin Constant argued. Between the negative liberty of the moderns and the positive liberty of the ancients there is a third alternative: the republican idea of liberty, i.e., "freedom as non-domination which requires that no one is able to interfere on an arbitrary basis — at their pleasure — in the choices of the free person."[46] Freedom in the republican context is always defined as independence (from the will of other men), and thus it is clearly different from the classical liberal view (liberty as absence of coercion), or from the democratic view (liberty as voluntary, self-imposed, restraint).

The cardinal category of the republican school is "virtue," understood

42. See Philip Pettit, *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), and Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 80-86.

43. Isaac Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited," in *American Historical Review*, No. 87, 1982, p. 630.

44. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, *op. cit.*, p. 59. The puzzle here is that nowadays American culture is individualistic, while at the founding it was not.

45. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

46. Pettit, *Republicanism*, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

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very broadly as a sacrifice of the self (especially of self-interest) in order to perfect the individual as he participates in the ongoing life of the republic. Wood's central thesis is that "the sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole formed the essence of republicanism and comprehended for Americans the idealistic goal of their Revolution."[47] Within this framework, property cannot be much more than an instrumental tool: a pathway to public participation and a safeguard of autonomy and independence. As Wood puts it: "Property in a republic was still conceived of traditionally . . . not as means of personal profit or aggrandizement but rather as a source of personal authority or independence."[48] But property was no natural right; it was a conventional and society-given right. Pocock concurs: "The citizen required the autonomy of real property, and many rights . . . were necessary in order to assure it to him; but the function of property remained the assurance of virtue."[49] So one had to become rich in order to show he possessed virtue, and thus could be a productive participant in the political life of the community.

It is also important to note that "there is no suggestion of limiting the power of government in the classical tradition as long as that power serves the common good."[50] The limitation of governmental power cannot be a political end of a republican community devoted to the search for the public good. Clearly, this is at odds with Lockean liberalism. Wood is sure that the early American shared a "willingness of the individual to sacrifice his private self interests for the good of the community."[51] According to Pocock, Americans were actually trying to resist capitalism and modernity during their revolution. In particular, the division of labor was a continuous source of anxiety: "Specialization . . . was a prime cause of corruption; only the citizen as amateur, propertied, independent, and willing to perform in his own person all functions essential to the *polis*, could be said to practice virtues."[52] One really wonders how this anti-market mentality could have flourished in a society that was on the verge of becoming the most successful capitalist venture in the history of the planet.

Wood is also an indefatigable revisionist. According to him, it was not

47. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
48. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution. How a Revolution Transformed a Monarchical Society into a Democratic one Unlike any that had Ever Existed* (New York: Knopf, 1992), p. 178.
49. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, History*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
50. Appleby, *Capitalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
51. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
52. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

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the fear of the mobs or the defects of the Articles of Confederation that prompted the call for the Philadelphia convention. Rather, the advocates of a stronger federal government "had a glimpse of what America was to become — a scrambling business society dominated by the pecuniary interests of ordinary people — and they did not like what they saw. . . . The wholesale pursuit of private interest and private luxury were, they thought, undermining America's capacity for republican government. They designed the Constitution in order to save American republicanism from the deadly effects of these private pursuits of happiness."[53]

So, in forging the Constitution, it was the American love of the market and the materialistic weakness of their countrymen that the Federalists were trying to thwart. If this is the case, then what better source of republican wisdom could be found than the *Federalist*, the series of essays written during the battle for ratification in the State of New York that future historians regarded as the ultimate groundwork of American constitutional thought? The word *virtue* appears twenty-one times. However, if one takes a closer look at the use of the term by *Publius*, and dismisses the phrase "by virtue of" and all the occasions in which "virtue" simply means honesty, integrity, and the like, one is left with a single "republican" reference. It occurs in *Federalist* 57, where "virtue" is used in close connection with common good, which republican scholars consider to be the standard for the whole revolutionary generation. "The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust."[54] If this is republicanism, it sounds pretty generic.

Classical liberalism, most notably embodied in Lockean political thought, guarantees full moral and political legitimacy to the pursuit of purely private interests. "In a liberal polity there is no duty to participate actively in politics, no requirement to place the public above the private and to subordinate personal interest to the common good."[55] The free

53. Wood, "Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution," in *Beyond Confederation. Origins of the American Constitution and American National Identity*, ed. by Richard Beeman, Steven Botein and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 81.

54. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, James Madison, *The Federalist* [1788], introduction by Edward Mead Earle (New York: Modern library, 1941), *Federalist* 57, p. 370.

55. William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 225.

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market's consensual relations regulate the legitimate order of dealings with other individuals, and natural rights doctrine (the principle that there are certain inalienable rights that cannot be encroached upon by the state) limits legitimate government actions. The boundaries of the political sphere are watertight, at least in principle: government should provide a safe environment for the individual's enjoyment of his natural rights. As Jefferson — the very improbable hero of republicanism — stated: "Our legislators are not sufficiently apprized of the rightful limits of their power; that their true office is to declare and enforce only our natural rights . . . and to take none of them from us. No man has a natural right to commit aggression on the equal rights of another; and this is all from which the laws ought to restrain him . . . and the idea is quite unfounded, that on entering into society we give up any natural right."[56] The limitation of power, thus being so clearly linked to liberty, becomes indirectly the most important political end of the classical liberal tradition.

A recent critic has summarized what seems to be wrong with republicanism: "The paradigm of classical republicanism seems a poor candidate for contemporary adoption. Too many of its central assumptions — that human nature has a uniform purpose or *telos* that can be fulfilled only through participation in political activity, that there exists an objective public good apart from individual goods, and that this objective good can be discovered through virtuous political debate — are highly uncongenial to modern ontology and epistemology. Most of us no longer believe that the good of the public could be anything other than some function of the good for individuals, we are skeptical that there is a uniform human nature capable of fulfillment only through politics, and the idea that republican politics would yield unanimity over the nature of the good strikes us as either delusive or tyrannical."[57]

The Republican as a Timid Communitarian

While most of the early works of republican revisionists were indeed scholarly ("magisterial" is the adjective most commonly associated with Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment*) and not ideologically oriented, by the 1980s the coming together of republicans and communitarians was a done deal. The republicans were unearthing a past too useful for communitarians

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56. Thomas Jefferson to Francis W. Gilmer (June 7, 1816), in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, *op. cit.*, Vol. XV, p. 24.

57. Richard H. Fallon, Jr., "What is Republicanism and is it Worth Reviving?" in *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. CII, Ch. 7 (1989), pp. 1698-99.

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to ignore. Also, contemporary liberals must have been reassured in their opinion that America had always been just waiting for the New Deal and the welfare state. As the preoccupation with the common good was of paramount importance for classical republicans, America's past aligns itself very much with its present. Liberty and equality turn out to be perfectly compatible. The republican Founding Fathers speak to contemporary man and, considering their (supposed) fondness for the common good, they suggest that America's political past is not at odds with the present-day political landscape. The New Deal, the welfare state, and government intervention in the free economy were there from the beginning, if not as a political practice, at least in the minds of the revolutionary generation. The American political horizon seems to be almost prefigured from the start, as virtue, common good, and all the other republican concepts can never be construed against taxation, redistribution, and salvation by government.[58]

Communitarians started to adopt republican themes from the early 1980s, i.e., from the beginning of their assault on liberalism. Michael Sandel has probably been the most honest about blending communitarianism and republicanism.[59] As one of "the contemporary critics of liberalism who would revitalize American public discourse by reclaiming a republican past,"[60] he believes that the discovery of a different American past, and the uncovering of its republican roots, will result in a change of public policy in the direction he desires: "If the 'republican school' is right about our ideological origins, then perhaps there is hope for revitalizing our public life and restoring a sense of community." In bringing up a usable past for communitarians to exploit, the republicans have performed an indispensable task. And the communitarians were ready to pay a tribute to republican theory. Sandel was probably the most consistent communitarian to perceive a civic humanist solution to the problem of

58. In order to appreciate Pocock's ideology, very much in line with the old Labour Party (i.e., as fiercely anti-free market as it is anti-Marxist), see the prefaces to the various editions of his methodological studies: *Politics, Language and Time*, especially the new edition and new preface of 1989 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Kramnick, one of Pocock's favorite polemical targets, notes with some truth: "Pocock sees liberalism as a mere popular front for Marxism." See Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 37. Appleby is probably right in her harsh judgment of Pocock: "one sometimes gets the impression that Pocock entered the world of civic humanism as a scholar and remained to become a partisan." See Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

59. See Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent, America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 123-167.

60. Michael J. Sandel, review of *The Lost Soul of American Politics*, by John P. Diggins, in *The New Republic* (June 10, 1985), p. 39.

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community and of the unencumbered self: as early as 1984, he advocated the need "to revitalize those civic republican possibilities implicit in our tradition but fading in our time."[61]

The sympathy runs even deeper: the contempt for natural rights, for instance, is just as vociferous among communitarians as among republicans. As MacIntyre has it, belief in natural rights "is one with the belief in witches and unicorns."[62] He must have been glad to learn from republican historians that almost nobody (with the possible exception of the unimposing John Locke) ever actually believed in such lunacy.

Michael Walzer was ready to admit, more than ten years ago, that "a revival of neoclassical republicanism provides much of the substance of contemporary communitarian politics."[63] He foresaw a potential ideological alliance: "Perhaps the doctrine [of classical republicanism] can be extended to account for a 'republic of republics,' a decentralized and participatory revision of liberal democracy."[64] It is hard to exaggerate the significance for communitarians of a political doctrine, supposedly very ancient, but of vital importance in the modern world, which focuses on virtue. This is especially true as such a doctrine does not derive from a peripheral section of the world, but has a geographical and temporal centrality to Western thought: from Greece and Rome, to Renaissance Florence, to England of the 1600s, and finally to the American founding.

MacIntyre's concept of virtue is also full of republican implications: "What constitutes the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to achieve such a life. We thus cannot characterize the good for man adequately without already having made reference to the virtues."[65] As "virtues . . . will sustain us in the relevant quest for the good,"[66] it is clear that virtue plays a central role in the communitarian pursuit for what is best for human beings. Yet, republicanism is to a degree independent of communitarianism: while the former has

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61. Michael Sandel, "Morality and the Liberal Idea," *The New Republic* (May 7 1984), p. 17. For a blending of communitarian and republican ideas, see Adrian Oldfield, *Citizenship and Community: Civic Republicanism and the Modern World*, (London: Routledge, 1990).

62. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), p. 69.

63. Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," in *Political Theory*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (1990), p. 19.

64. *Ibid.* p. 20.

65. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

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no problem with the historical product of political communities, i.e., the nation-state, the latter sponsors a radical redefinition of communities all around the globe, and aims at the dismantling of existing states. Communitarians dream of a highly decentralized form of coercion; republicans are quite happy with the centralized state that exists today.

In their scorn of capitalism, communitarians often revert to openly Marxist themes unacceptable to mainstream republicans. But the standard communitarian critique of the impersonality of the free market, viewed as a cold mechanism, which in the long run is not the servant but the master of human beings, must also appeal to republicans. Thus, Walzer believes that every free and socially unplanned exchange necessarily entails the domination of one part over the other. "In theory at least, free exchange creates a market within which all goods are convertible into all other goods through the neutral medium of money. . . . But everyday life in the market, the actual experience of free exchange, is very different from what the theory suggests. Money, supposedly the neutral medium, is in practice a dominant good, and it is monopolized by people who possess a special talent for bargaining and trading — the green thumb of bourgeois society."[67]

As Sandel explains, his (and one might safely add the republican-communitarian) objection to liberalism "is that it seeks to define and defend rights without affirming any particular conception of the good life."[68] According to communitarian thinkers, liberalism portrays the individual as an isolated atom, and sees the whole social fabric as nothing but the coexistence of millions of subjects deprived of their relations to each other. Walzer holds that the liberal doctrine brings about a "society where individuals are relatively dissociated and separated from one another." In such a society, "individual life can be described in these two philosophical languages, the language of utilities and the language of rights."[69] From this premise, it follows that "we liberals are free to choose, and we have a right to choose, but we have no criteria to govern our choices except our own wayward understanding of our wayward interests and desires. And so our choices lack the qualities of cohesion and consecutiveness. We can hardly remember what we did yesterday; we cannot with any assurance predict what we will do tomorrow. We cannot give a proper account of ourselves. We cannot sit

67. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), pp. 21-22.

68. Michael J. Sandel, "Liberalism and Republicanism: Friends or Foes? A Reply to Richard Dagger," in *The Review of Politics*, Vol. LXI, No. 2 (1999), p. 211.

69. Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *op. cit.*, p. 8.

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together and tell comprehensible stories, and we recognize ourselves in the stories we read only when these are fragmented narratives, without plots, the literary equivalent of atonal music and nonrepresentational art."[70]

Since human beings are merely individuals, instead of cells of a complex organism, their lives can have no direction or purpose. Communitarianism may be the most important contemporary effort to rethink the political community in a collectivist fashion, as it is untenable to entrench the welfare utopia as a set of social rights, allegedly stemming from the exigencies of human existence. But communitarians end up in the same quagmire as the so-called liberals, because they portray society as an archipelago of historical tribes, sexual preferences, social categories, and ethnic and religious groups. Communitarians, modern liberals, and republicans are actually much closer to each other than it appears. To the old tradition of social-democratic theory, oriented to the satisfaction of individual needs, communitarians have added a new concern for differences and group identities. Modern liberals are ready to accommodate such concerns, as they work to combine the welfare state with the multicultural jungle.

Republicans and communitarians share a fierce opposition to classical liberalism (republicans contend that this hostility was shared by the Founding Fathers). But "liberalism" so understood is unsophisticated to a fault, because they utilize the mantle of liberalism to denote belief systems that are different, both historically and theoretically. In their view, "liberal" is a perfectly good label for classical liberals and social democrats alike: Locke and Rawls, Constant and Keynes, Hayek and John Stuart Mill, Mises and Darhendorf are just some of the thinkers that alledgedly belong to the same school of thought. Liberalism becomes a term so vague that it encompasses the whole Western tradition — give or take Hegel and Marx. One may wonder what clarity could come out of concocting a tradition that never existed, one that puts together the critics of *laissez-faire* and the enemies of social planning.

Yet, there is a certain logic in grouping together the defenders of the free market and the devotees of big government. Liberalism is an "individualistic, rights-based ethics."[71] Communitarians talk endlessly about the opposition of the unencumbered versus the situated self: it does not matter how much one favors the government or the free market, coercion or freedom, as these are false alternatives. The real issue is that of the individual

70. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

71. Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 66-67.

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and the community, of the language of rights or of responsibilities. Present-day liberals and communitarians argue in favor of the welfare state, though they entertain different options on how to make this machinery work. They have no objections to the incursions of public powers in human relations, and all the exhausting debates about "justice vs. truth," "rights vs. responsibilities," etc., take place within the dominant statist view. In the end, contemporary political discussions turn out to be nothing more than disputes among socialists of different orientations. Though they may differ in their premises, in the desired outcomes and on the criteria that should guide social planning, republicans, so-called liberals, and communitarians never question the prerogatives of the political and bureaucratic caste to dispose at will of individual and communal resources. And the "constituency" they are looking for is the same one. According to Bill Brugger, republicanism "must appeal . . . to children, women, and many others . . . [like] socialists, environmentalists, feminists, and advocates of multiculturalism."[72]

Republican thought has had a great influence in legal scholarship. Thus, Cass Sunstein calls for accepting the "republican synthesis" not only as an historical explanation, but also as a normative criterion.[73] Accordingly, the courts should ensure that government decisions are not the product of private interests, but rather the fruit of an ample and open "public deliberation."[74] In other words, the courts should investigate the legislative process with substantial latitude and purge the laws not formed according to an "open republican process." If one follows Sunstein to his logical conclusions, the courts should simply nullify the existing laws passed in contempt of a just republican process, thus judging each and every law according to a test of "procedural republican legitimacy." The well-known dictum, thus restated, applies: "every time I hear the clarion call for more deliberative democracy, I put my hand on my wallet."[75]

When libertarians suggest a little civil disobedience against laws that trouble the individual conscience, they are considered to be hardly better

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72. Bill Brugger, *Republican Theory in Political Thought: Virtuous or Virtual?* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), p. 42. In his reconstruction of a modern republican pedigree Brugger begins with Machiavelli and ends with Rawls: his book aims at bridging the gap between communitarians and liberals.

73. See Cass Sunstein, "Beyond the Republican Revival," in *Yale Law Journal*, Vol. XCVII, No. 8 (1988), pp. 1539-1590.

74. Cass Sunstein, "Naked Preferences," in *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. LXXXIV, No. 7 (1984), p. 1731.

75. Richard A. Epstein, "The Necessity for Constrained Deliberation," in *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (2000), p. 159.

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than insurrectionists, while these bizarre theses that would vest the court system with as much power as the absolutist monarchs of early modern Europe are considered perfectly respectable, coming as they do from mainstream political thought. What is amazing about these arguments is not that they are formulated by laymen who harbor peculiar views about the commonwealth, but by professors who try to buttress their doctrines by a reading of the American past that can hardly be termed uncontroversial.

Rousseau: Authentic Republican Hero

Republican thought in its purest form is to be found not in 16th century Florence or in 17th century England, but rather in a French-speaking tradition that actually matches most of the tenets of the republican school. It is obsessed with the common good, and dignifies persons only when they are concerned with public duties, while despising them as petty when they are preoccupied with their day-to-day lives. Most importantly, it dismisses individuals as totally unimportant entities in and of themselves, who can find salvation only in the benevolent embrace of the state. This is the tradition of Rousseau, a thinker neglected by Wood, Banning, and most of the others.[76]

Rousseau should be the true hero of republicanism. If there is one truly revolutionary character who tried to develop the full potential of republicanism, it is Robespierre — Rousseau's devoted follower — not Jefferson. It is difficult to miss the republican import of Rousseau's reflections, since for him the task of the sovereign authority is to transform "each individual, who is by himself a perfect and solitary whole, into part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and his being."[77] Rousseau is the key thinker of communitarians, the philosophically more sophisticated cousins of republican theorists. MacIntyre, Walzer, and Taylor claim Rousseau as one of their favorite thinkers, since he did everything possible to break down the distinction between positive and negative freedom. But Rousseau is not for the timid. He could be an inspiration for political theorists who understand that government is coercion and are ready to advocate the use of state force to the fullest extent.

Walzer emphasizes that virtue is political participation, of which the republicans and Rousseau seem to be very well aware of. "Rousseau defines a virtuous citizen as one who 'flies to the assemblies' . . . Today we are

76. One problem with Rousseau is that, as is well known, he was irrelevant for the Americans who revolted against the British Empire in the 1770s.

77. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, tr. with an introduction by G.D.H. Cole (London : J.M. Dent, 1946), Book II, Ch. 7, p. 68.

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more likely to give that definition a pluralistic twist: many different assemblies, reflecting the material and ideal interests of different, though overlapping, groups of citizens. Virtue is still best displayed . . . at meetings."[78] The real enemy of human sociability, according to Rousseau, is the property owner: he is a criminal, because he destroyed the original unity among men by raising barriers — literal fences — between himself and his fellow man.

While hardcore republican historiography has generally been oblivious of this seminal republican thinker, the picture is gradually changing. In *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock seemed to give him full credit, as "the Machiavelli of the eighteenth century,"[79] but the rest of his quotations are few and generic. In Wood's *Creation*, Rousseau is mentioned twice, inconsequentially and without a single reference. But others have included him in the Olympus of republicanism. Thus, Maurizio Viroli presented Rousseau as a palatable classical republican, since for Rousseau "there is but one form of liberty: republican liberty."[80] Of course, in doing so Viroli had to obliterate many of the features which make Rousseau a rather sinister character in the gallery of classical republicans. Not only does Viroli present the author of *The Social Contract* as favorable to property ownership, but he goes so far as to render him the champion of property rights: "Private property is a sacred right grounded in the social contract. Thus any attempt to confiscate private property would be unlawful."[81]

According to Richard Dagger, Rousseau's "definition of citizens not as mere bearers of privileges and immunities but as 'participants in the sovereign authority' already points in the republican direction." He praises "the richness of Rousseau's brand of republican liberalism."[82] Along with most middle of the road communitarian-republicans, Sandel believes that Rousseau gives republicanism a bad name, as his ideas are on "the coercive face of soul craft."[83] Moreover, Rousseau is inimical to differences

78. Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin. Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 55-56. The reference to Rousseau is *Social Contract*, Book III, Ch. 15.

79. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

80. Maurizio Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the 'Well-Ordered Society'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 11.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 6. On the same page, he claims that "Rousseau . . . sees the State as a guarantor of property rights."

82. Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues, Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 92 and 97.

83. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, *op. cit.*, p. 319. For a critical assessment of Sandel's Rousseau, see Jonathan Marks, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Michael Sandel and the Politics of Transparency," in *Polity*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4 (2001), pp. 619-643.

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within a republic, since he views "political community as an undifferentiated whole," and rejects a "pluralist vision"[84] of republican politics. Yet, in Rousseau's work one finds patriotism, self-sacrifice, attachment to the republic, and everything needed to diminish the individual so that the dichotomy between the person beleaguered by civilization and the natural being is washed out. Rousseau exalts more or less everything that republicanism is supposed to stand for. It is indeed in *The Social Contract* that one finds innumerable references to "virtue," the "common good," and the "public good," whose existence is taken for granted. Of course, all these concepts are encapsulated in Rousseau's notion of the general will, and virtue becomes nothing more than the docile conformity of the individual to the general will, the will of the sovereign. It is with Rousseau that one can clearly see the beginning of a tradition in which limitation of power is not a problem, constitutional formulas are meaningless, along with the negation of all the principles that are part and parcel of classical liberalism. "The Sovereign, being formed wholly of the individuals who compose it, neither has nor can have any interest contrary to theirs; and consequently the sovereign power need give no guarantee to its subjects, because it is impossible for the body to wish to hurt all its members. We shall also see later on that it cannot hurt any in particular. The Sovereign, merely by virtue of what it is, is always what it should be."[85]

The true liberty of men is to conform to the will of the state, and the essence of virtue in the Rousseauian community is to be ready to prostrate oneself before the general will. The maximum degree of republican virtue is, in fact, to follow the general will even when — and particularly when — it flows against one's private interests.

The Counterrevolution in Historiography

An anonymous quotation goes: "We can never hope to be right; the most that we can hope for is to be wrong in interesting ways."[86] The republican paradigm began building up in the 1960s and 1970s as a new, distinctively wrong, but somewhat interesting way of analyzing the past. Soon, however, it tried to recreate the past, and thus merged its efforts with the communitarian critique of liberalism. It went from revisionism to revivalism. At that point, the republican synthesis became a little tedious

84. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
85. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I, Ch. 7.
86. Cited by Brian L. Crowlet, *The Self, the Individual, the Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. V.

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and plainly wrong. Moreover, by now, the republican school can no longer claim leadership of the scholarship of the American founding.

Asher Horowitz and Richard Matthews have stated that the debate on the founders' ideology has now settled on "paradigmatic pluralism": late 18th century American political thought was wrapped up in many different and sometimes conflicting political discourses, of which republicanism was merely one.[87] Other historians are willing to use the words liberal and republican not as opposite, but as companion concepts. Richard Dagger engages in extreme concept twisting in order to reconcile these differing ways of thinking.[88] One thing is certain: nobody could claim today that republicanism is the only way of thinking the Founding Fathers could have chosen, since there were no alternatives, i.e., the bombastic claim that Pocock made: "A neoclassical politics provided both the ethos of the elites and the rhetoric of the upwardly mobile, and accounts for the singular cultural and intellectual homogeneity of the Founding Fathers and their generation. Not all Americans were schooled in this tradition, but there was (it would almost appear) no alternative tradition in which to be schooled."[89]

A certain irony might be detected in the fact that in the beginning it was the republican contention that Locke, liberalism, and natural rights were negligible at the founding. Then, after the counterrevolution, republicans are the ones trying to present the two doctrines as not so conflicting after all: now they even talk of "republican liberalism." Lance Banning believes that republicanism was no more than a hypothesis, one that in addition could live side by side with the settled convictions of previous generations of historians. "The republican hypothesis . . . had never been intended to deny a central role in the Revolutionary thinking for liberal ideas — not, at least, if 'liberal' means a democratic, individualistic, and contractual conception of the origins and limits of governmental power. . . . Rather, the republican hypothesis had always seemed to me to be an argument that Lockean or liberal ideas were only part of an inheritance, a context, or a universe of thought which could be better understood by recognizing that it was a great deal more complex than earlier interpretations had suggested."[90]

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87. Asher Horowitz and Richard K. Matthews, "'Narcissism of the Minor Differences': What is at Issue and What is at Stake in the Civic Humanism Question," in *Polity*, No. 30 (1997), pp. 7-9.

88. See Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, *op. cit.*

89. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, p. 507.

90. Lance Banning, "The Republican Interpretation: Retrospect and Prospect," in *The Republican Synthesis Revisited, Essays in Honor of George Athan Billias*, ed. by M. M. Klein, *et al.* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), pp. 93-94.

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The force of the counterrevolution in historiography has been astounding. It "has been altogether successful in trimming the exclusivist claim of the synthesizers. The . . . dominance of the revisionist account is now merely a matter for textbooks and other venues that lag behind current scholarship."[91] And the republican school is now split: Pocock on one side, and the rest on the other. The disagreement was admitted by none other than Banning in a footnote: "American historians have not ordinarily gone as far as Pocock toward discounting Locke's influence."[92] One might picture Pocock, the scholar who has revisioned his revisions the least in the past decades,[93] as a general of an army in total disarray. In fact, the American high-ranking officers are actually abandoning the field: "Banning now wishes to speak of something he calls "liberal republicanism," Michael Lienisch of a "hybrid" between the two traditions. Wood wants to deny he ever saw republicanism and liberalism as contraries."[94]

After concessions to his critics here and there, Wood has restated his position, arguing from the same perspective, but reaching a different conclusion.[95] The problem was how it was possible that America, this pure republican, anti-commercial, self-sacrificing haven, became, in less than fifty years after the revolution, "the most liberal, the most democratic, the most commercially minded, and the most modern"[96] country in the world. Apparently, this was owing to the perverted effects of "classical republicanism." The search for virtue and civic participation is, according to Wood, the noble and higher part of the revolution, while the predilection for a market order that seems paramount in early American history is to be considered the democratic degeneration of the revolutionary impetus.

According to Wood, "liberalism" represents the fall from the republi-

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91. Michael P. Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic. Studies in the Foundation of the American Political Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), pp. 208-209.

92. Lance Banning, "Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (1986), p. 11n.

93. Actually, Pocock was forced to give in on some points. Thus, he does not consider anymore the American revolution a *British Revolution*: "The American Revolution was therefore an American Secession and not a British Revolution." J. G. A. Pocock, "Political Thought in the English-speaking Atlantic, 1760-1790. Part 1: The Imperial Crisis," in *The Varieties of British Political Thought 1500-1800*, ed. by J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 280. Clearly, this is a fundamental change for the editor of *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

94. Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

95. See Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, *op. cit.*

96. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

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can Eden. It is nothing but the byproduct, in itself radical, of "a betrayed revolution."[97] Wood's conclusion is that democracy and corruption prevailed. "A new generation of democratic Americans was no longer interested in the revolutionaries' dream of building a classical republic of elitist virtue out of the inherited materials of the Old World. America, they said, would find its greatness not by emulating the states of classical antiquity, not by coping the fiscal-military powers of modern Europe and not by producing a few notable geniuses and great-souled men. Instead, it would discover its greatness by creating a prosperous free society belonging to obscure people with their workaday concerns and their pecuniary pursuits of happiness — common people with their common interests in making money and getting ahead. No doubt the cost that America paid for this democracy was high — with its vulgarity, its materialism, its rootlessness, its anti-intellectualism. . . . The American Revolution created this democracy, and we are living with its consequences still."[98]

In any case, the Lockean counterrevolution has been productive, as it has forced some to rethink the role of Locke as the English founding father. After the works of Huyler, Zuckert, Dworetz, and a number of others, it will be much more difficult to dispute the diffusion, utilization, and relevance of Lockean moral philosophy in the colonies and the early republic.[99] Paul Rahe states: "The civic humanism," which some purport to find in 17th and 18th century Britain and America, "is by and large a figment of the scholarly imagination."[100] More recently, Jerome Huyler, who persuasively demonstrates how widespread was the Lockean creed in the colonial and founding period, suggests: "it is time to discard altogether the essentially misleading Lockean/republican dichotomy."[101] The most succinct refutation of the entire intellectual republican construction is to be found in a divertissement by Diggins, the rewriting of the *Declaration* using the rhetoric of republicanism.

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97. See Joyce O. Appleby, "The Radical Recreation of the American Republic," in *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, Vol. LI, No. 4 (1994), pp. 679-683.

98. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

99. See Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), and *The Natural Rights Republic, op. cit.*; Steven Dworetz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine*, *op. cit.*; R.C. Sinopoli, *The Foundations of American Citizenship: Liberalism, the Constitution, and Civic Virtue* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992).

100. Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 570.

101. Jerome Huyler, *Locke in America. The Moral Philosophy of the Founding Era* (Lawrence, University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p. 39.

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The result is so grotesque that the political universe of the signers of the actual document comes out clean of any influence of "*vivere civile*" and civic humanism. "We hold these truths to be historically conditioned: that all men are created equal and mutually dependent; that from that equal creation they derive rights that are alienable and transferable depending on the larger question of needs, among which are the preservation of life, liberty, and the pursuit of virtue in close cooperation with all fellow citizens dedicated to the commonwealth; that to fulfill these needs government is instituted among men that derives its legitimacy from the active participation of the governed . . . . Whereas the very identity of Americans lies in their symbol-forming, language using nature, whereas we the colonists have no recourse to God, nature or history to guide our actions, and whereas, therefore, we must rest our case on language and its context, we hereby appeal to parliament to organize a committee of Whig historians to show us the true path to virtue."[102]

The republican interpretation in the realm of historiography is likely to share the fate of the progressive school of the early 20th century (its ideological predecessor). Vanished and dismissed as a general paradigm, the school nonetheless left a permanent mark on the profession. The dichotomies created by progressive historians, "the rights of man *v.* the rights of persons," for instance, have not yet disappeared,[103] but the general explanation of Charles Beard and the others is no longer accepted. Similarly, the stress on virtue, self sacrifice, political participation, public happiness, and the like cannot to be expected to fade away soon. But the idea that somehow the political history of the West could be rewritten using "civic humanistic" jargon — the essence of the republican revolution in historiography — will seem persuasive only to a coterie of die-hard ideologues entrenched in the most prestigious quarters of Western academia.

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102. See Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 364-365.

103. See, for instance, Jennifer Nedelsky, *Private Property and the Limits of American Constitutionalism. The Madisonian Framework and Its Legacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

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Notes and Commentary:

Understanding Conservatism and Tradition

James Kalb

To understand conservatism it is essential to understand how conservatives differ from leftists and libertarians. Basic oppositions in politics are usually concerned with fundamental issues of social organization. Who will be supreme: king or parliament, pope or emperor, local community, nation, or transnational bureaucracy? Such issues are as important now as they were for the Cavaliers and the Roundheads. So a simple explanation for the major divisions in political thought today is concerned with differing ideas of how society should be organized. Each way of running things creates a party that favors it.

The main ways of organizing society today are bureaucracy, markets, and tradition, which are very different from each other. Bureaucracy creates administrative structures that put things in order by deciding directly how they will be. Markets let order emerge from men's dealings with each other under a regime of private property and free contract. Tradition accepts the arrangements that grow out of attitudes, practices, and beliefs that become authoritative over time in the life of a community. (Popular rule is also a way of deciding how things should be organized, but its effect is usually to choose which combination of the three ways mentioned should run things day to day).

The three organizational principles do not exclude each other, and any modern society has to draw on all of them. Bureaucracy cannot be avoided, attempts to do away with markets have failed catastrophically, and neither bureaucracy nor markets can exist without traditions that support and guide them. Indeed, bureaucracy and markets can become traditions. Nonetheless, the three principles often collide. Thus, in family life, traditional arrangements are often at odds with the principles of free contract or the welfare state. When such conflicts arise, one principle must be chosen over the others, and the one habitually put first determines political orientation.

So a basic distinction among leftists, libertarians, and conservatives today is that leftists are the party of bureaucracy, libertarians of markets, and conservatives of tradition. The point is obvious in the case of libertarians, and almost

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equally so in the case of conservatives. While conservatives do not always say that tradition is their standard, attachment to heritage is what distinguishes them from others. Leftists are often reluctant to admit their attachment to bureaucracy, because it is a dirty word and because of their connections to anti-authoritarian movements, but their policies and programs put the matter beyond doubt. What is more basic to the leftist program today than "political correctness," affirmative action, and economic redistribution, and who can imagine those things without all-pervasive bureaucracy?

The three tendencies have fared very differently in the marketplace of ideas. One reason is that clear and simple views that seem to answer everything do better than complicated views that leave a lot obscure. As a result, the party of bureaucracy — the leftists — have usually found the going easiest. Bureaucracy is the obvious way to apply expert knowledge to social life and to solve all possible problems. It fits easily into the technological outlook dominant today, so much so that those who favor it cannot believe that any informed and well-meaning person could disagree with them. In addition, leftists heavily influence the schools and media, so leftist attitudes, beliefs, and authorities get widely propagated.

However, what sells is not always what is true. Experience and economic theory both demonstrate that central planning and control cannot do what people expect of them. Libertarians and modern "classical liberals" have been able to debunk the claims of bureaucrats by demonstrating the necessity of markets for freedom, prosperity, and other good things, sometimes dressing up their demonstrations with romantic images of opportunity, choice, and economic creativity. While such people are not as numerous as their opponents, they have established an intellectual presence and influence beyond their numbers. Their advantages have been the clarity, force, and refinement of their arguments, and the obvious failures of bureaucratic management.

Conservatives have had a more difficult time of it, because they are concerned with things that are harder to present than social engineering or markets. Leftists and libertarians attempt to grasp society as a whole by looking at it, so to speak, from without. Leftists want to establish social policies that promote equality, prosperity, security, and the like. Libertarians favor the arrangements that arise when individuals freely pursue their own goals through exchange. Both have a clear institutional viewpoint and set of standards from which to view society and argue their positions. Given any social practice, they can say where it fits in and what standards should govern it by referring to their master principle. Those qualities give them an enormous advantage in debate.

Conservatives look at life in society from within. They are concerned with social practices more from the viewpoint of those practices than from a unifying external perspective. Since they accept social practices on their own terms, they find it natural for each major aspect of life to run on its own principles, while recognizing and accommodating other spheres of activity. Thus, conservatives let

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family life, religion, and politics have their own intrinsic value and scope of action, rather than treating them as instruments of some master principle like efficiency, social welfare, or liberation of the individual. That is the reason, for example, that conservatives neither mistake religion for politics nor exclude it from public life.

The rejection of any simple principle for measuring everything saves conservatism from the radical elitism implicit in judging social institutions from above, and makes civic participation, rather than theoretical correctness, the basis of a good society. It is also the reason conservatives tend to accept inherited practices, in accord with their internal standards, rather than attempt to reform them in accord with some external principle of universal applicability. They do not feel obliged, for example, to make all institutions democratic.

That lack of universal answers is unhelpful in debate. Conservatives are better at criticizing their opponents, usually on the grounds that their proposals are self-defeating and based on a false understanding of human life, than at arguing a positive case. The basic problem they face, apart from the lack of a simple theory to explain everything, is that the habit of accepting tradition seems odd to people today. Why should one accept what is passed down? Most people today find it more rational to experiment, to talk to an expert, or to look things up on the Internet than simply to do what has been done before. After all, those who come later, presumably know more than those who came before.

Conservatives used to be able to score points by appealing to continuity, loyalty, and settled facts, but no longer. Continuity is not a good argument when one's opponent promises radical improvements, and loyalty is no argument at all when the past has been debunked and there is an unbreakable taboo against questioning one's opponent's loyalty. Besides, the attack on tradition is a settled fact, and it seems radical to oppose it. So conservatives today cannot just say "this is how things have been done and it has not been too bad." Like everyone else, they have to be forward-looking and give reasons for their views.

Indeed, to the extent that the traditions of modernity have become anti-traditional, conservatives must become radical in a sense. Leftists who call conservatives "extremist" do so because they think they can make the accusation believable. So conservatives cannot stand pat. They must argue against the particular traditions of modernity in favor of the principle of tradition, and in favor of the older and more comprehensive standards and traditions that continue to sustain human life by making such things as family life and ordinary everyday honesty possible.

So what can be said in favor of the principle of tradition, of living with social practices as they are, and of working with them in light of experience and tradition, in opposition to the modern practice of remodeling society on abstract standards of efficiency and equality? One answer is that markets and bureaucracies need tradition. To work at all well they require a whole complex of habits, attitudes, and beliefs, supported by factors like family arrangements, religious commitments, and standards of respectable conduct. Such factors do not operate on

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market or bureaucratic principles. They grow up informally and in ways that cannot be planned or controlled, through the growth of settled habits and attitudes among people who live together and deal with each other for a long time. They are thus essentially traditional.

That answer suggests a kind of minimalist conservatism often found among chastened leftists and libertarians who have read Oakeshott or Hayek. Leftist or liberal goals will not be achieved unless people have the understandings and habits — honesty, diligence, restraint, public spirit — that make it possible for bureaucracies, markets, and institutions of self-government to work properly. Those understandings and habits cannot be counted on unless they are part of a stable and authoritative tradition by which people live. Grown-up leftists and libertarians must favor whatever is needed to have a generally-accepted tradition that fosters such things.

But what is needed? It is likely to be more than minimalist conservatives expect. An analogy to socialism and free markets may be helpful. When the socialists became convinced that markets were necessary, they tried to invent a "social market" consistent with socialist ideals. It turned out to be impossible. If the principle of central control comes first, the market suffers severely. If the principle of contract sets the tone, socialism must be given up. While bureaucracy may be useful for particular goals, the failure of attempts to save socialism indicates that in a modern economy the market must take the lead. From an intellectual standpoint, at any rate, libertarianism has won its argument with the Left.

A similar result seems certain in the case of an attempt to create a traditionalism that is a subordinate part of a fundamentally leftist or libertarian order. Leftism and libertarianism emphasize equality and satisfaction of individual goals within an orderly framework that facilitates them. However, to accept tradition is to accept a great deal on trust, and so requires loyalty to something larger than the individual that cannot be fully rationalized. That loyalty is not likely to last when subordinated to equality and self-interest. Values like patriotism and love of family are not matters of calculation or personal advantage. If genuine self-sacrifice is needed, as in wartime, can the need for an orderly framework to advance self-interest and promote equality be enough to motivate it? Can that need be enough to motivate even the public honesty and stable family life indispensable for a tolerable society?

It seems not. Tradition — the habit of loyalty to one's society and its ways — is necessary to establish the overall order within which social institutions like markets and bureaucracies can function. It follows that it cannot be justified by reference to market or bureaucratic considerations, which are of necessity subordinate, but must be viewed as authoritative in its own right. Since society cannot be rationalized on clear simple principles, evolved social practices must be accepted to a large extent on their own terms.

But what personal reason does anyone have to treat tradition as authoritative? Is it only that one should do so as a member of society, otherwise social

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order will be impossible? Or does tradition have internal qualities that make it reasonable to recognize its authority? And what about bad traditions? Surely loyalty should not be blind!

The answer is found in the nature of human life. To accept tradition is to accept life on the whole as it is. The alternative is to construct some new form of life based on supposed superior knowledge. However, life is too complex, subtle, and all-embracing to be reconstructed in more than marginal ways. One might be able to invent a better mousetrap starting from scratch, or program a VCR simply by reading the manual. More complicated activities that cannot be analyzed so clearly require acceptance of a particular culture and tradition. Such activities are learned by imitating, doing, and participating in the traditions that define them. Without tradition, complex human activities could not exist at all. Thus, speech is impossible without accepting what constitutes a particular language and a particular tradition.

In the case of very high-order activities, like politics, religion and the conduct of life in general, individual inventiveness and expertise that is not integrated become wholly subsidiary. The statesman and saint are not those who have studied religions and political systems and become experts, or those who claim to have mastered those things so they can do with them what they want. They are those who live the life of religion and politics as they exist in a particular tradition supremely well. How could it be otherwise, when such activities are so complex and subtle that no one could hope to state all their principles, and so all-embracing that an external perspective is impossible? The so-called innovations of great men only fulfill what was there already. Washington and Lincoln acted out of loyalty to their country and wanted to maintain something good it had long possessed. Christ based his teaching on the Law and the Prophets, and aimed only to fulfill them. How do such men compare with men like Robespierre, Lenin, and Hitler, who rejected and destroyed societies they considered to be rotten in the name of a radical new order of their own invention?

Life depends on loyalty. To live as a human being is to accept and to follow tradition. Without participation in the traditions that constitute the social world of shared habits, attitudes, beliefs, etc., people would be like children fostered by wolves — dumb animals with no concept of who they are, and no goals other than immediate gratification of crude instinct. It is only because one takes part in the world that one knows who one is and what he wants. To reject the authority of tradition is to leave that world, thus becoming less than human.

As for bad traditions, they are deemed so through other traditions. Ultimate standards of goodness, beauty, and truth are too basic to isolate and to study from outside. Since one's relation to them is part of what makes one what one is, they are beyond the reach of the ideals of neutrality and impartial expertise that have led moderns to try to base everything on economics, social science, and formal abstractions like equality. Without involvement in forms of life that embody ultimate standards, it is impossible to know them.

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The forms of life that embody the good, the beautiful, and the true cannot be private creations. An understanding of ultimate things inevitably reflects one's experience and commitments. If the understanding is merely personal, that is all it can reflect. To attain a tolerable degree of objectivity and reliability, the ultimate standards must draw on the experience and commitments of others, and be integrated with an enduring way of life capable of accumulating lessons and reflecting them in its practices. In short, they must be part of a comprehensive tradition of life. Adherence to tradition is necessary to one's ability to make sense of things by reference to ultimate standards on which reliance is justified. Loyalty to tradition is therefore — paradoxically — necessary to the reform of tradition.

The reliability of tradition enables people to view it as anchored in realities it does not exhaust. Just as bureaucracy must respect markets and markets tradition, one must understand tradition as oriented toward something beyond itself that is capable of guiding people's actions, because it is not a creation of one's own will. It is from that orientation toward something transcendent that tradition draws its final authority. In the end, human society, as conservatives recognize, is always in some way religious. Human life cannot be carried on in a world that does not make sense in some reliable way, and the world makes sense through traditions that point to something beyond themselves. It follows that tradition is the natural state of man, and at bottom he can never abandon it.

But what — someone might ask — is the point of talking about tradition if people are always traditional in some sense, and if tradition explains even the modification and abandonment of tradition? The answer is that today the necessity of accepting tradition is in effect denied, and the denial distorts all thought and action. The fight for tradition is not a matter of creating it or putting it on life support, but of opposing what disrupts it, strengthening what supports it, and providing ways for it to defend itself so it can be restored after it has been weakened. It is facilitating the natural functioning of human society.

The modern emphasis is too much on technology, on breaking things down to their simplest parts and reconstructing them in accord with human will. The problem with applying that approach to human life as a whole is that one can make sense of one's actions only by reference to standards and realities one does not create. The direct application of will to social reality through bureaucracy must accept the setting created by the unplanned aggregation of individual wills through the market, and the latter must in turn accept a larger setting, i.e., the human world created by the aggregation of human perceptions, experiences and habits through tradition.

Modern political life rebels at such necessities. As an example, "affirmative action" demands the forcible eradication of the practical consequences of traditionally-recognized distinctions among human beings. The only differences allowed to matter are those based on economic function or bureaucratically-determined status. Age, sex, religion, family ties, and culture are to be made irrelevant

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to social status and life chances no matter what the social, moral, or economic cost. That demand is based on the view that particularities such as culture — the habits, attitudes, assumed standards, presumptions, ties, loyalties, and collective memories one acquires by growing up in a particular setting — should not matter, and if they do, they should be forced as a practical matter not to matter.

Such a demand involves a denial of the legitimacy of tradition as such. It asserts that the world must be what one forces it to be, not what it turns out to be as a result of the ways of life people develop. "Celebrating cultural diversity" is really celebrating the practical abolition of culture and its replacement by bureaucratic uniformity. All cultures are to be equal, which means they are all to be made irrelevant to everything that matters except as bureaucratic classifications intended to counteract the real effects of cultural differences.

Such efforts and the attitudes behind them are ignorant and anti-human, and their consequences are displayed in the degraded state of American culture and politics. Abolishing the significance of culture is not liberating; it makes men brutish, and is inconsistent with a tolerable society. A renewed appreciation of the role of tradition and limits of abstract principle is required so that bureaucracy, markets, politics, and all other spheres of activity can take their place in a stable way of life that accepts the whole of human reality. It is for that renewed appreciation that conservatism today must stand.

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Why Primitivism?

John Zerzan

Guy Debord's biographer has formulated today's puzzle as to why "the results of human activity are so antagonistic to humanity,"[1] recalling a question posed nearly 50 years ago: "What has become of that opportunity to become more fully human that the 'control of nature' was to provide?"[2] The general crisis is rapidly deepening in every sphere of life. On the biospheric level, this reality is so well-known that it could be termed banal, if it were not so horrifying: increasing rates of species extinctions, proliferating dead zones in the world's oceans, ozone holes, disappearing rainforests, global warming, the pervasive poisoning of air, water, and soil, etc.

A grisly link to the social world is widespread pharmaceutical contamination of watersheds.[3] In this case, destruction is driven by massive alienation, masked by drugs. In the US, life-threatening obesity is rising, and millions suffer from serious depression and/or anxiety.[4] There are frequent eruptions of multiple homicides in homes, schools, and workplaces, while the suicide rate among young people has tripled in recent decades.[5] Fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and other "mystery"/psychosomatic illnesses have multiplied, vying with the emergence of new diseases with known physiological origins: Ebola, Lassa fever, AIDS, Legionnaires' disease. The illusion of technological mastery is mocked by the antibiotic-resistant return of TB and malaria, not to mention outbreaks of Ecoli, Mad Cow disease, West Nile virus, etc. Barely suppressed anger, a sense of emptiness, corrosion of belief in institutions, high stress levels all contribute to what Claude Karnoouh has called "the growing fracture of the social bond.[6]

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1. Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1999), p. 3.
2. Joseph Wood Krutch, *Human Nature and the Human Condition* (New York: Greenwood, 1959), p. 192.
3. Janet Raloff, "More Waters Test Positive for Drugs," in *Science News* 157 (April 1, 2000).
4. The dramatic upsurge in health-threatening obesity has occasioned many articles, but exact figures are elusive at this time. 27% of adult Americans suffer from depression or anxiety disorders. See G. S. Malhi, *et al.*, "Recognizing the Anxious Face of Depression," in *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* 190 (June 2002).
5. S. K. Goldsmith, T. C. Pellner, A. M. Kleinman, W. E. Bunney, eds., *Reducing Suicide: A National Imperative* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002).
6. Claude Karnoouh, "On Interculturalism and Multiculturalism," in *Telos* 110 (Winter 1998), p. 133.

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Today's reality underlines the inadequacy of current diagnoses and the overall retreat from any redemptive project. What is left of life on earth is being taken away. Where is the depth of analysis to match the extremity of the human condition and the fragility of the planet's future? Is a totalizing current of degradation and loss all that is left? The crisis is diffuse, but also starkly visible on every level. As Ulrich Beck put it: "people have begun to question modernity . . . its premises have begun to wobble. Many people are deeply upset over the house-of-cards character of superindustrialism."[7] The human condition becomes less stable and more chaos-prone the further one moves away from nature, contrary to the dominant ideology of progress and development.[8] With disenchantment comes a growing sense that something different is urgently needed. The challenge is at a depth that is almost entirely avoided. To go beyond the prospectless malaise and the collapse of social confidence, the analytical perspective must shift radically.[9] This would consist, for openers, in refusing Foucault's conclusion that human relations are inescapably technologized.[10] As Voegelin put it, "The death of the spirit is the price of progress."[11] But if the progress of nihilism is identical to the nihilism of progress, whence the rupture? How can one pose a radical break from progress, technology and modernity? A quick scan of recent academic fads shows precisely where such a perspective has not been found.

Fredric Jameson's formulation introduces the subject: "Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good."[12] Postmodernism is the mirror of an ethos of defeat and reaction,[13] a failure of will and intellect that has accommodated to new extremes of estrangement and

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7. Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. 37.

8. Agnes Heller, *Can Modernity Survive?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 60.

9. See Michel Houellebecq, *The Elementary Particles*, tr. by Frank Wynne (New York: Knopf, 2001). More prosaically, Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2000) and Pierre Bordieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, tr. by Richard Nice (New York: New Press, 1999), characterize modern society along these lines.

10. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Random House, 1984), pp. 47-48.

11. Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Vogelin*, Vol. 5, *Modernity Without Restraint* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 105.

12. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. ix.

13. John Zerzan, "The Catastrophe of Postmodernism," in *Future Primitive* (New York: Autonomedia, 1994). Thus, Daniel White prescribed "a postmodern-ecological rubric that steps past the traditional either-or of the Oppressor and Oppressed. . ." See his *Postmodern Ecology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 198. Bordieu referred to "the futility of the strident calls of 'postmodern' philosophers for the 'suppression of dualism.' These dualisms, deeply rooted in things (structures) and in bodies, do not spring from a simple effect of verbal naming and cannot be abolished by an act of performative magic. . ." See Pierre Bordieu, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 103.

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destruction. For postmodernists, almost nothing can be opposed. After all, reality is so messy, shifting, complex, indeterminate; and oppositions are, of course, just so many false binarisms. Vacuous jargon and endless side-stepping transcend passé dualisms. In the consumerist realm of freedom, "this complex node, where technologies are diffused, where technologies are chosen,"[14] who can say if anything is at all amiss?[15] The fixation on surface (depth is an illusion; so are presence and immediacy), the ban on unifying narratives and inquiry into origins, indifference to method and evidence, emphasis on effects and novelty, all find their expression in postmodern culture at large. These attitudes and practices spread everywhere, along with the technology it embraces without reservation. At the same time, there are signs that these trivializing and derivative recipes for "thought" may be losing their appeal.[16] An antidote to postmodern surrender has been made available, largely through what is known as the anti-globalization movement.

Lyotard, who thought that technologized existence offered options, now writes about the sinister development of a neo-totalitarian, instrumentalist imprisonment. Earlier, he pointed to a loss of affect as part of the postmodern condition. More recently, he has attributed this loss to techno-scientific hegemony. Crippled individuals are only part of the picture, as Lyotard portrays social effects of instrumental reason in pathological ascendance. *Contra* Jürgen Habermas, this domination by instrumental reason is in no way challenged by "communicative action."[17] Referring to global urban development, Lyotard stated: "We inhabit the megalopolis only to the extent that we declare it uninhabitable. Otherwise, we are just lodged there." Also, "'with the megalopolis, what is called the West realizes and diffuses its nihilism. It is called development."[18] In other words, there may be a way out of the postmodern *cul-de-sac*, at least for some.

14. See Mike Michael, *Reconnecting Culture, Technology and Nature* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 8. The very title is testimony to the surrender to domination.

15. As an eloquent voice of postmodern abjectness, Iain Chambers wonders whether alienation is not simply an eternal given: "What if alienation is a terrestrial constraint destined to frustrate the 'progress' introjected in all teleologies?. . . Perhaps there is no separate, autonomous alternative to the capitalist structuring of the present-day world. Modernity, the Westernization of the world, globalization, are the labels of an economic, political and cultural order that is seemingly installed for the foreseeable future." See Iain Chambers, *Culture After Humanism* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 122 and 41.

16. Recent titles indicate a shift. See, e.g., Martin Beck Matustic and William L. McBride, eds., *Calvin O. Schrag and the Task of Philosophy After Postmodernity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002) and Carmel Flaskas, *Family Therapy beyond Postmodernism* (New York: Taylor and Francis Inc., 2002). Tilottama Rajan and Michael J. Driscoll, eds., *After Poststructuralism: Writing the Intellectual History of Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) is haunted by themes of origins and the primitive.

17. Jean-François Lyotard, "Domus and the Megalopolis" [which could very well have been called, in anti-postmodernist fashion, "*From* Domus *to* the Megalopolis"] in *The Inhuman: Reflections of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 200.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 200, and Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 23.

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Those still embroiled in the Left have a much different legacy of failure to jettison that obviously transcends the "merely" cultural. Discredited and dying as an actual alternative, this perspective also needs to go. Thus, self-described communist militants such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have no notion whatsoever of the enveloping crisis. They continue to seek "alternatives within modernity." They locate the force behind their communist revolution in "the new productive practices and the concentration of productive labor on the plastic and fluid terrain of the new communicative, biological, and mechanical technologies."[19] The leftist analysis valiantly upholds the heart of productionist Marxism, in the face of ever-advancing, standardizing, destructive technique. Small wonder Hardt and Negri fail to consider the pulverization of indigenous cultures and the natural world, or the steady worldwide movement toward complete dehumanization.

Karnoouh considers monstrous "the idea that progress consists in the total control of the genetic stock of all living beings." This would amount to an unfreedom "that even the bloodiest totalitarianism of the 20th century was not able to accomplish."[20] Hardt and Negri would not shrink from such control, since they do not question any of its premises, dynamics, or preconditions. It is no small irony that the militants of *Empire* stand exposed for their incomprehension of the trajectory of modernity by one of their opposite number, Oswald Spengler. *The Decline of the West* is a masterwork of world history, and Spengler's grasp of Western civilization's inner logic is uncanny in its prescience. Especially relevant here are Spengler's judgments concerning technological development and its social, cultural, and environmental impacts. He saw that the dynamic, Promethean ("Faustian") nature of global civilization becomes fully realized as self-destructive mass society and equally calamitous modern technology. The subjugation of nature leads ineluctably to its destruction, and to the destruction of civilization. "An artificial world is permeating and poisoning the natural. The Civilization itself has become a machine that does, or tries to do everything in mechanical terms."[21] Civilized man is a "petty creator against Nature." ". . . This revolutionary in the world of life. . . has become the slave of his creature. The Culture, the aggregate of artificial, personal, self-made life-forms, develops into a close-barred cage. . . ."[22]

Whereas Marx viewed industrial civilization as both reason incarnate and a permanent achievement, Spengler saw it as ultimately incompatible with its physical environment, and therefore suicidally transitory. "Higher Man is a tragedy. With his graves he leaves behind the earth a battlefield and a wasteland. He has

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19. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 218.

20. Claude Karnoouh, "Heidegger on History and Politics as Events," in *Telos* 120 (Summer 2001), p. 126.

21. Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life*, tr. by Charles F. Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1932), p. 94.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

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drawn plant and animal, the sea and mountain into his decline. He has painted the face of the world with blood, deformed and mutilated it."[23] Spengler understood that "the history of this technics is fast drawing to its inevitable close."[24]

Theodor Adorno concurs with parts of Spengler's thinking: "What can oppose the decline of the west is not a resurrected culture but the utopia that is silently contained in the image of its decline."[25] Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*[26] has a critique of civilization centered around the focal image of Odysseus forcibly repressing the Sirens' song of eros. The book's central thesis is that "the history of civilization is . . . the history of renunciation."[27] If there is no escape from an all too well-known condition, what more is there to say? Herbert Marcuse tried to lay out an escape route in *Eros and Civilization*[28] by attempting to uncouple civilization from modernity. To preserve the "gains" of modernity, the solution is a "non-repressive" civilization. Marcuse would dispense with "surplus repression," implying that repression is indispensable. Since modernity depends on production, itself a repressive institution, redefining work as free play can salvage both modernity and civilization. This is an implausible, even desperate defense of civilization. Marcuse fails to refute Freud's view that civilization cannot be reformed.

Freud argued that non-repressive civilization is impossible, because the foundation of civilization is a ban on instinctual freedom and eros. To introduce work and culture, the ban must be permanently imposed. Since this repression and its constant maintenance are essential to civilization, universal civilization brings universal neurosis.[29] As a good bourgeois, Freud justified civilization on the grounds that work and culture are necessary, and that civilization enables humans to survive on a hostile planet. "The principal task of civilization, its actual *raison d'être*, is to defend us against nature." And further: "But how ungrateful, how short-sighted after all to strive for the abolition of civilization! What would then remain would be a state of nature, and that would be far harder to bear."[30]

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23. Oswald Spengler, *Frühzeit der Weltgeschichte*, #20. Quoted in John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline* (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 2001), p. 224.
24. Spengler, *Man and Technics*, *op. cit.*, 103.
25. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 72.
26. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
27. *Ibid.*, p. 55. As Albrecht Wellmer summed it up, "*Dialectic of Enlightenment* is the theory of an irredeemably darkened modernity." See Albrecht Wellmer, *Endgames: the Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 255.
28. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).
29. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: Random House, 1994). Durkheim had already noted that as humankind "advances" with civilization and the division of labor, "the general happiness of society is decreasing." See Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 249.
30. Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion," in *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21 (London: Norton, 1976), p. 15.

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Possibly civilization's most fundamental ideological underpinning is Hobbes' characterization of the pre-civilized state of nature as "nasty, brutish, and short." Of course, Freud subscribed to this view, as did Adorno and Horkheimer.

Since the mid-1960s, there has been a shift in how anthropologists understand prehistory.[31] Based on a solid body of archaeological and ethnographic research, mainstream anthropology has abandoned the Hobbesian hypothesis. Life before or outside civilization is now defined more specifically as social existence prior to domestication of animals and plants. Mounting evidence indicates that before the Neolithic shift from a foraging or gatherer-hunter mode of existence to an agricultural lifeway, most people had ample free time, considerable gender autonomy or equality, an ethos of egalitarianism and sharing, and no organized violence. Archaeologists continue to uncover examples of how Paleolithic people led mainly peaceful, egalitarian, and healthy lives for about two million years. The use of fire to cook tuberous vegetables as early as 1.9 million years ago, and long distance sea travel 800,000 years ago, are two findings among many that testify to an intelligence equal to that of today's humans.[32]

Genetic engineering and imminent human cloning are just the most current manifestations of a dynamic of control and domination of nature that humans set in motion 10,000 years ago, when our ancestors began to domesticate animals and plants. In the 400 generations of human existence since then, all of natural life has been penetrated and colonized at the deepest levels, paralleling the controls that have been ever more thoroughly engineered at the social level. Now this trajectory can be seen for what it really is: a transformation that inevitably brought all-enveloping destruction that was in no way necessary. Significantly, the worldwide archaeological record demonstrates that many human groups tried agriculture and/or pastoralism, and later gave them up, falling back on more reliable foraging and hunting strategies. Others refused for generations to adopt the domestication practices of close neighbors.

It is here that a primitivist alternative has begun to emerge. Ever-growing documentation of human prehistory as a very long period of largely non-alienated life

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31. A misleadingly-named "Man the Hunter" conference at the University of Chicago in 1966 launched the reversal of the Hobbesian view, which for centuries had provided ready justification for all the repressive institutions of a complex, imperializing Western culture. Supporting evidence for the new paradigm has come forth from archaeologists and anthropologists such as Marshall Sahlins, Richard B. Lee, Adrienne Zihlman, and many others. See Eleanor Leacock and Richard B. Lee, *Politics and History in Band Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Richard B. Lee and Richard Daly, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine de Grecyter, 1972); Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Adrienne Zihlman, *et al.*, *The Evolving Female* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

32. See, e.g., M. J. Morwood, *et al.*, "Fission-track Ages of Stone Tools and Fossils on the East Indonesian Island of Flores," in *Nature* (March 12, 1998).

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stands in sharp contrast to the increasingly stark failures of untenable modernity.[33] In the context of his discussion of the limitations of Habermas, Joel Whitebook wrote: "It may be that the scope of and depth of the social and ecological crisis are so great that nothing short of an epochal transformation of world views will be commensurate with them."[34] Since that time, Castoriadis has concluded that a radical transformation will "have to launch an attack on the division of labor in its hitherto known forms."[35] Division of labor, slowly emerging through prehistory, was the foundation of domestication and continues to drive the technological imperative forward. The challenge is to disprove George Grant's thesis that this is "a world where only catastrophe can slow the unfolding of the potentialities of technique,"[36] and to actualize Karnoouh's judgment that revolution can only be redefined against progress.[37]

33. This critique is growing in the US, with periodicals such as *Anarchy*, *Disorderly Conduct*, *The Final Days*, *Green Anarchy*, *Green Journal*, and *Species Traitor*. See also Chellis Glendinning, *My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994); Derrick Jensen, *Culture of Make Believe* (New York: Context Books, 2002); Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael* (New York: Bantam, 1995); John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2002).

34. Joel Whitebook, "The Problem of Nature in Habermas," in *Telos* 40 (Summer, 1979), p. 69.

35. Cornelius Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), p. 257. See also Keekok Lee, "To De-Industrialize — Is It So Irrational?" in *The Politics of Nature*, ed. by Andrew Gobson and Paul Lucardie (London: Routledge, 1993).

36. George Grant, *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 142. Of course, the situation grows more and more grave, with sudden, dire changes very possible. See M. Sheffer, *et al.*, "Catastrophic Shifts in Ecosystems," in *Nature* (October 11, 2001); M. Manion and W.M. Evan on the growing likelihood of disasters, "Technological Catastrophes: their causes and preventions," in *Technology in Society* 24 (2002), pp. 207-224.

37. Claude Karnoouh, "Technology and Destiny," in *Telos* 124 (Summer, 2002), pp. 71-94.

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Voegelin's Antignosticism and the Origins of Totalitarianism

Arthur Versluis

In the last half of the 20th century, a great deal has been learned about the religious phenomenon of late antiquity known as Gnosticism.[1] Prior to the extraordinary discovery of the Nag Hammadi library — a collection of Gnostic writings found in Egypt in clay jars in 1945 — it was possible to hold to a single view, a caricature of Gnosticism, along the lines proposed by Hans Jonas.[2] By late 20th century, that simplistic characterization of Gnosticism (derived from its opponents of late antiquity, like Irenaeus and Epiphanius) as dualistic, anti-cosmic, pessimistic, and the like was largely discarded. Yet one still finds anachronistic and peculiar accounts of "Gnosticism" by Eric Voegelin and his followers that routinely claim "gnosis" as the origin of modern totalitarianism. This misinterpretation of Gnosticism amounts to a modern variant of heresiology.

Voegelin's best known account of "Gnosticism" is in a 1958 essay, though he had written about "Gnostic" politics or political movements many years earlier. One would expect that Voegelin was going to establish some concrete connection between science, politics and Gnosticism, the three subjects listed in the title of the essay — that he would define Gnosticism and then show how it

1. Here one should be aware of the conventional distinction between the *generic* terms "gnosis" (direct realization of spiritual truth for oneself) and "Gnostic" (those who realize spiritual truth or union — a term that can apply not only to Christians, but also to, e.g., Muslims and Buddhists), and the *specific* terms Gnosticism and Gnostic, which are generally taken to refer to the Christian religious currents of late antiquity that later became demonized by what came to be known as orthodox Christianity. For an analysis of the subject in another context, see Wouter Hanegraaf, "On the Construction of 'Esoteric Traditions'" in Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff, eds., *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), pp. 11-62, esp. p. 36, where Hanegraaff quotes Hans Blumenberg. In *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung* [(Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), p. 144], Blumenberg writes that "When someone says that modernity would be better labeled 'the Gnostic era,' he recalls to memory the enemy from the beginning [der *Urfiend*], who did not come from outside but sat at the very root of Christianity's origin." Hanegraaff adds, "That is well-formulated," and concludes that "heresiological propaganda" did not cease with the Enlightenment, but continued in secular form in the "conspiracy" and "disease": interpretations of esotericism like Voegelin's. In brief, Hanegraaff's article in many respects confirms the thesis of this one.

2. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963).

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emerges in today's science and politics. Drawing on the antignostic Irenaeus, in the introduction he briefly sketches the outlines of Gnosticism as the realization of "gnosis itself: knowledge."[3] He does not spell out what this knowledge is. Instead, he writes that the Gnostic's aim is "always destruction of the old world and passage to the new," and that gnosis is a "means of escaping the world."[4] At the end of this misleading characterization, Voegelin warns that self-salvation through knowledge has its own magic, and this magic is not harmless. The structure of being will not change because one finds it defective and runs away from it, he tells us, and further claims that the "Gnostic" attempt to destroy the world will not succeed, but will only increase social disorder.

Unpacking Voegelin's characterization of gnosis will show why it is so thoroughly misleading. He suggests that gnosis is just another form of ordinary knowledge. But "gnosis" refers to knowledge of God or, to put it another way, transcendence of the subject-object division. While "knowledge" presupposes a subject knowing an object, gnosis may be best characterized as the realization of inner union between individual consciousness and divine revelation. "Revelation" implies a "revealer," and Gnostic writings contain numerous references to a divine revealer: Christ. Gnosticism cannot be described as "self-salvation." Gnostic writings repeatedly stress divine revelation and the need for both human effort toward realizing gnosis, as well as the need for corresponding divine grace or angelic help. Most interesting of all is Voegelin's claim that the "Gnostic" seeks destruction of the old world, and that such "Gnostic" attempts are futile efforts to disturb the order of being and the social order.

But there is no evidence that Gnostics were engaged in anything of the kind. During the emergence of Christianity in late antiquity, Gnosticism represented a shift from Platonism or Hermetism in that, in the Nag Hammadi library writings, Gnostics often insisted on the decisive revelatory power of Christ, separating them from other contemporary religious traditions. Platonism and Hermetism are discussed in the Nag Hammadi collection, but there is no urge toward "world destruction" or even the deliberate disruption of the social order. Rather, there is an insistence on direct inner spiritual experience as opposed to worldly or social power. There are numerous instances of revelations, and some ethical admonitions, as well as what may be called "mystery sayings" like those of Christ in the Gospel of Thomas.

Voegelin's account of Gnosticism, which meanders from Plato to Marx to Nietzsche (with nary a mention, let alone a definition of gnosis or Gnosticism until he discusses Nietzsche), makes no sense: "In this 'cruelty of the intellectual conscience' can be seen the movement of the spirit that in Nietzsche's gnosis corresponds functionally to the Platonic *periagoge*, the turning-around and opening of the soul. But in the Gnostic movement man remains shut off [!] from transcendent

3. Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Regnery, 1958), p. 11.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

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being. The will to power strikes against the wall of being, which has become a prison. It forces the spirit into a rhythm of deception and self-laceration."[5] Thus, without reference to anything authentically Gnostic, Voegelin claims that Nietzsche represents a "gnosis shut off" from transcendence. Further, he represents a "will to power" that leads to "deception," and all of this in turn leads to the pronouncement: "To rule means to be God; in order to be God, Gnostic man takes upon himself the torments of deception and self-laceration."[6] In all of this, "gnosis" and "Gnostic" are tossed in and misused. Gnosis here is described as being "shut off," when earlier Voegelin admitted that it meant "freedom" and "salvation."

In discussing Hegel, Voegelin also brands him a "Gnostic," and then offers the following: "Gnosis desires dominion over being; in order to seize control of being the Gnostic constructs his system. The building of systems is a Gnostic form of reasoning, not a philosophical one."[7] The subsequent tautology goes: Gnostics reputedly had systems; Hegel had a system; therefore Hegel is a Gnostic, and further, all system-builders are Gnostics. Why does Voegelin claim that "gnosis desires dominion over being"? Did he not write earlier that the Gnostic seeks to escape the world, and shortly after that of the Gnostic's will to destroy it? And does not all of this disregard gnosis as inner spiritual revelation and union with the divine? The problem here is that Voegelin's work has an entirely different agenda.[8]

To understand this agenda, consider the obvious clues scattered throughout Voegelin's work. Elsewhere he claims that *the entire Reformation movement and the whole of modernity* must be "understood as the successful invasion of Western institutions by Gnostic movements."[9] "This revolutionary eruption of the Gnostic movements . . . is so vast in dimensions that no survey even of its general characteristics can be attempted in the present lectures."[10] Voegelin goes on to offer a brief sketch of Richard Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, an overview of 16th century Puritanism, and concludes that Puritanism as a whole was Gnostic. Given the hostility of Calvin and of Calvinism in general to mysticism, let alone Gnostic thought, one can only conclude that in Voegelin's view, Calvin and Calvinism (and the entire Reformation movement) were Gnostic even in the midst of their hostility to Gnosticism. Ironically, this is precisely the kind of rhetorical inversion

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5. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
8. Voegelin's work is irrelevant to the study of Gnosticism. As Gregor Sebba wrote, "nowhere in the thousands of scholarly papers, books, and reviews [is there] any evidence that Voegelin's early and later work on Gnosticism has even been noticed. There is good reason for that." See Gregor Sebba, "History, Modernity, and Gnosticism," in *The Philosophy of Order: Essays on History, Consciousness and Politics*, ed. by Peter Opitz and Gregor Sebba, (Stuttgart: Klett, 1981), p. 190.
9. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 134.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

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that Voegelin attributes to none other than — Gnosticism.[11]

Voegelin extends his condemnation of Gnosticism not only to Hegel and Protestantism, but beyond it to virtually the entire modern world. "By Gnostic movements we mean such movements as progressivism, positivism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, communism, fascism, and national socialism."[12] But the ubiquity of Gnosticism is the logical conclusion only if one believes, as Voegelin does, that "all Gnostic movements are involved in the project of abolishing the constitution of being, with its origin in divine transcendent being, and replacing it with a world-immanent order of being, the perfection of which lies in the realm of human action."[13] Such a definition stretches "Gnosticism" so far as to include any effort at social reform.

Voegelin corresponded for many years with Alfred Schutz, to whom on January 1, 1953, he wrote concerning his views on Christianity. In this revealing letter, Voegelin elaborates on his distinction between "essential Christianity" and what he construes to be "the gnosis of historical eschatology."[14] "The sectarian movements and certain trends within Protestantism insist that eschatological Christianity is the essential one, while what I call essential Christianity is for them the corruption of Christianity by the Catholic Church." If this were not clear enough, Voegelin, near the end of his letter, says it directly: "this essential Christianity can be identified with Catholicism."[15] The gist of all this is clear: Protestants and modernity are Gnostic; except in certain cases, Catholicism is not.

Here, the larger picture begins to emerge, which is not exactly what Voegelin had in mind. In this letter and in much of his later work, Voegelin confuses Gnosticism and "historical eschatology" or millennialism. But Gnosticism is *opposed* to an historicist view of Christianity. Has anyone who has studied the history of gnosis failed to recognize the clear division between those who espouse "horizontal" historical faith (*pistis*), on the one hand, and those who espouse gnosis ("vertical" realization), on the other? This division is at the very heart of many Gnostic writings. Indeed, in the Gospel of Thomas, Christ directly tells his disciples that they seek him somewhere else (historically or "horizontally"), when the truth is

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11. Philip J. Lee took up Voegelin's argument in *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), where he discusses how "Gnostic" Calvinism is, how the US Founding Fathers make "awesome Gnostics," and how modern Protestantism has to purge itself of this growing menace.

12. Eric Voegelin, "Ersatz Religion," in *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Regnery, 1968), p. 83. For a critique of the claim that practically any movement is Gnostic, see Ioan P. Couliano's "The Gnostic Revenge: Gnosticism and Romantic Literature," in *Gnosis und Politik* (Munich: W. Fink, 1984), p. 290.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

14. See *The Philosophy of Order*, *op. cit.*, p. 452.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 456. Curiously, he mentions Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa (certainly Gnostics within the Catholic tradition), but because they do not correspond to his peculiar political definition of Gnosticism, he does not directly attack them.

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right there before them in the "vertical" present moment. One finds this kind of assertion also in the Gospel of Philip and other Nag Hammadi texts.[16]

Why would Voegelin invest Gnosticism with exactly the historicizing characteristics to which Gnostics are most opposed? Where did this Christian tradition of historical eschatology originate? Within Catholicism, Voegelin frequently cites Joachim of Fiore, the medieval Calabrian abbot, who envisioned history as unfolding in three successive ages: that of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Joachim anticipated a "third age" in the immediate future. This millennialism is a theme implicit in Christianity as a whole, and has generated many millennialist perspectives. But it could also be argued that this millennialist tendency is precisely a *result* of the loss of gnosis ("vertical" direct spiritual realization for oneself) as a possibility within Catholicism. The rejection of an orthodox gnosis (even that represented by St. Clement of Alexandria) and the emergence of a Catholic hierarchic social structure with an emphasis on historical faith and the mediating power of the Church — this is the origin of "historical eschatology."

Early Gnostics, and Gnostics of all kinds, insist that individuals must seek direct inner spiritual realization (gnosis). This is not to say that such traditions necessarily imply anarchy or total individualism, only a simple communal organization not unlike that of Jesus and his disciples. This is evident not just in the relatively small early Gnostic groups, but also in more recent Gnostic traditions like the Christian theosophy of Jacob Böhme.[17] Such groups exist in order to help individuals find spiritual realization; they do not have worldly or historical aims; their aims are "vertical." When this Gnostic impulse is *absent*, there is the "horizontal" and historical-eschatological development of a corporate, hierarchic Church structure that actively opposes and, even for a considerable length of time, by way of the Inquisition, persecutes and murders those who espouse some form of gnosis.

If Voegelin is falsely accusing Gnostics of the very thing (historicism) typical of what he terms Catholicism's "essential Christianity," a different possibility emerges. What if Voegelin's attacks on Gnosticism were a rhetorical deception to disguise the true origins of totalitarianism? Early as well as subsequent Gnostics are the *dissidents* within Christianity. They are the ones willing to stand alone and even die in defense of their beliefs. Historically, they are the victims. Where does one find the totalization of society in a corporate body that expels or murders its dissidents? Could the Inquisition be a real predecessor of modern totalitarianism?

Such an analysis is not unprecedented. Alain de Benoist locates the origin of totalitarianism in monotheism, in the totalizing God who will have no other gods before him, and who commands the Jews to kill their enemies, to put the

16. See, e.g., Gospel of Philip, 86; Gospel of Thomas, 113; Dialogue of the Savior, 137-138.

17. See Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), esp. Chapter XVIII, "Theosophy and Gnosticism."

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inhabitants of that city where people serve other gods "to the sword, destroying it utterly, all who are in it and its cattle. . . Burn the city and all its spoil."[18] One need not go so far in indicting monotheism, yet it must be acknowledged that there is a real tension between one perspective that insists on dogmatic formulations based on historical eschatology resulting in the murder of dissidents, and another that champions direct spiritual realization. This opposition is implicit within Jewish, Christian, and Islamic monotheism from antiquity to the present. This is what Voegelin's work disguises by confusing Gnosticism with historicist millennialism.

From this viewpoint, Voegelin's work has an entirely different set of implications. His account of the emergence of modern totalitarianism suddenly suggests that fascism and communism have their origins in prior doctrinal systems enforced on pain of torture and murder, that the roots of the Marxist or fascist historical faith in a future state that justifies almost any means to achieve it, including mass murder, must be located in historicist-eschatological Christianity. Who represents what Voegelin calls the "cruelty of the intellectual conscience" and the will to "domination": the Inquisitor torturing and murdering a female Gnostic like Marguerite of Porete or the victim? Here, it is clear why he blames Gnostics, since he embraced an "essential Christianity" substantially identical with Catholicism. Instead of looking to historicist Christianity for the origins of totalitarianism, Voegelin blames the victims: the Gnostics, who represent the dissident *opposition* to totalitarianism.

As it turns out, the attribution of virtually everything bad in the modern world to "Gnosticism" has an interesting genealogy. Voegelin is only one branch on a fairly large family tree. Generally, this account began with Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860), who explained the history of religion as an Hegelian Gnostic phenomenon developing in a dialectical evolutionary movement toward unity with the Godhead.[19] Baur's Tübingen school of Protestantism eventually turned out to be an extreme form of anti-supernaturalism. Baur saw Gnosticism in antiquity through Hegelian goggles, thus forging a link between Gnosticism and Hegel that later Voegelinians could use, even if the rest of Baur's work was discarded.[20] Harking back to Baur is convenient in that he was an Hegelian at the time.

The next major branch on this tree is Hans Jonas, who also saw gnosticism through peculiar lenses; in his case, those of early 20th century existentialism. Jonas defined gnosticism as a dualistic, world-rejecting phenomenon. He

18. See Alain de Benoist, *L'Europe Païenne* (Paris: Seghers, 1980); *Comment peut-on être païenne?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981). See also his dialogue with Thomas Molnar in *L'Éclipse du sacré* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1986), pp. 129-177. See also Deuteronomy 13.

19. Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis, oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Tübingen: 1835), p. 21ff.

20. Sebba, "History, Modernity, and Gnosticism," *op. cit.*, p. 192. An earlier and more extensive analysis of gnosticism can be found in Gottfried Arnold's *Unparteiische Kirchen-und-Ketzerhistorie* (1700), which is somewhat unsuitable for Voegelinism, since it is sympathetic to gnosticism.

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depicted gnosticism — with its emphasis on the gnostic mythology of the ignorant demiurge, the malevolent archons, the fallen Sophia, and the effort of the gnostic seeker to reach the kingdom of light — as a form visible in the Nag Hammadi library in such works as "The Gospel of Philip" and even more clearly, "The Hypostasis of the Archons." This form of "classical gnosticism" is only one of many different currents. Yet late 20th century Voegelinians' efforts to justify Voegelin's bizarre political renderings of gnosis and gnosticism rely almost exclusively on Jonas' outdated account of "classical gnosticism."[21]

An apologist for Voegelin's political misuse of Gnosticism, Stephen McKnight, seeks to justify this misuse by extending it to the whole of Western esotericism, beginning with the *prisca theologia* of the Renaissance. He notes that recent scholarship "diminishes the status of ancient Gnosticism as the primary source of modern epistemological and political disorder. . . . Moreover . . . Voegelin was already acknowledging problems with a unilinear emphasis on Gnosticism and encouraging the exploration of other esoteric traditions like magic, alchemy, and Renaissance neoplatonism."[22] Rather than simply attacking Gnosticism, McKnight seeks to extend the field of "heresiology" to magic, alchemy, Ficino — whatever can be roped in as a purported "source of modern epistemological and political disorder." In discussing a lecture Voegelin delivered in 1971, in which it becomes clear that he had begun to realize that his account of Gnosticism was untenable, McKnight quotes Voegelin's reflections on his earlier works on Gnosticism. There he emphasized "the dogmaticization which sets [in] whenever a book is published, [which was] perhaps more dangerous with regard to this subject [Gnosticism]. . . Because immediately the problem of gnosis as characteristic of modern political ideas . . . was absolutized, and every day I get questions of this kind: is, for instance, the Russian government a Gnostic government? Of course things are not that simple — gnosis is one element in the modern compound, but there are other elements . . . for instance, the apocalyptic traditions and Neoplatonic experiences and symbolizations."[23] In other words, by 1971 Voegelin had realized that modern scholarship did not agree with his idiosyncratic perspective, so he sought to expand his witchhunt for the sources of the evils of modernity among Renaissance Neoplatonists, practitioners of magic and alchemy, and the like. But by this time the Voegelinian misuse of "Gnostic" had

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21. *Ibid.*, pp. 195ff. According to Sebba, Jonas holds "a special position." This is so, even though Jonas' depiction of Gnosticism has long been superseded by the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library and other research.

22. Stephen McKnight, "Voegelin's Challenge to Modernity's Claim to be Scientific and Secular," in *The Politics of the Soul*, ed. by Glenn Hughs (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 186.

23. See Stephen McKnight, "Gnosticism and Modernity: Voegelin's Reconsiderations in 1971," 2001 APSA Panel Paper, available online at http://www.pro.harvard.edu/papers/091/091007/McKnightSt.pdf. See also Stefan Rossbach, "'Gnosis' in Eric Voegelin's Philosophy," at http://www.pro.harvard.edu/papers/091/091007/RossbachSt.pdf.

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ossified into political dogma, and even he could not stop it. Furthermore, he still held to his basic thesis that esotericism was to blame for the ills of modernity.

Here one should consider these authors' emphasis on "order" and fear of "disorder": it is precisely the kind of totalitarian thinking that one finds in the communist and, to a lesser extent, in the fascist state. In the totalitarian state, there is no room for dissidence: the dissident is the source of "disorder," and must be imprisoned, tortured, or killed. This is the logic of the Inquisition, which also sought to impose social and religious order at all costs, including human life.[24] Voegelinians do not hesitate to take this fetish for order and rejection of dissidence to its extreme. Sebba elaborates what is implicit in McKnight's account: "The *gnosis* of the Gnostic is *agnoia*, ignorance of the truth. But it is not innocent ignorance: he *wills* the untruth, although he *knows* the truth. But why then does he will the Evil? Why is there Evil at all? . . . The history of ancient Gnosticism has become the history of the discord."[25] This makes absolutely no sense — except if the author sees himself as a modern Irenaeus: a heresy-hunter. Here the idea of imposed order is contraposed to the Gnostic, who is now openly identified with "Evil." Not just evil, but capitalized evil — evil incarnate, opposed to the One Truth of the historical Church or of the totalitarian state. In their hatred for the least sign of the esoteric, Voegelinians reveal themselves to be akin to the very totalitarianism whose origins they purport to be exposing.

But not all antignostics are so direct in their demonization of Gnosticism. Another development should be mentioned here: Cyril O'Regan's work. His perspective is more an outgrowth of "hyper-intellectualism": the hyper-theoretical manifestations of the "linguistic turn" in literary theory and philosophy. In *Gnostic Apocalypse*, O'Regan spends almost no time demonstrating that Jacob Böhme is a Valentinian Gnostic, and almost all his time constructing his own abstract linguistic-rhetorical edifice, using such terms as "Valentinian narrative grammar" and "deformations of Valentinian grammar."[26] He claims that "Böhme's visionary discourse constitutes a metalepsis of the biblical narrative, in that its six-stage narrative of divine becoming disfigures every single episode of the biblical narrative, as interpreted in and by the standard pre-Reformation and Reformation

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24. This obsession with order haunts not only Voegelin's work, but that of his followers as well. It leads McKnight to attribute strange things to Gnostics, as when he claims that "the Gnostic regards the search for innerworldly fulfillment as a sign of ignorance (*agnoia*), not *gnosis*." *Ibid.*, p. 202

25. See *The Philosophy of Order*, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

26. Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Böhme's Haunted Narrative* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 1, 231 and 299. Historical details get almost no play at all: on the first page (and throughout the book) the names of major figures are misspelled. Jane Leade, founder of the Philadelphian Society, becomes "Jean Lead"; and Swedenborg becomes "Swendenborg." O'Regan does not even seem to be aware of an extensive treatment of Böhmean theosophy published by his own publisher. See Versluis, *Wisdom's Children*, *op. cit.*

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theological traditions."[27] Böhme's work shows "how apocalyptic Neoplatonism and the Kabbalah can live together in a master discourse that displays Valentinian transgressive properties."[28] But there is no evidence that any of these specific historical traditions actually appear in Böhme's work. The key word is "transgressive": Böhme is made out to be a "Valentinian," and therefore "transgressive" of order represented by the projected unity of the whole of "pre-Reformation and Reformation theological tradition"[29]

On the next page, the Böhmean "mode of thinking is dismissed as "irredeemably past." In O'Regan's view, Böhme represents "an impossible hope for a form of knowledge — perhaps any form of knowledge — that would escape the hegemony of an all-controlling rationality."[30] According to O'Regan, it is impossible for Böhme's thought to be meaningful today or in the future — it merely represents a "deranging of biblical narrative" that is somehow "parasitic," just like he thinks Valentinianism was. Gnostics are "pneumapathological."[31] The ponderous prose here has an underlying agenda that is very much akin to Voegelin's: it is something like the unidimensional totalitarianism Herbert Marcuse discussed in *One-Dimensional Man*. What is clear in these works is a concerted effort to dismiss and, beyond that, to annihilate all that they construe as Gnostic. They are a kind of hegemonic near-totalitarianism that can be traced back to the antignostic rhetoric of the early Church Fathers like Tertullian, Epiphanius, and Irenaeus.

All of this would be amusing and a little sad, were it not for the fact that this antignosticism has both a following and consequences. In Buddhism, one can find something different: a range of perspectives and a general consensus within a tolerance of alternative, but related views. This is very close to the more pluralistic perspectives one finds within Gnosticism, as evidenced by the range of works in the Nag Hammadi Library, and for that matter within the pluralism of Western Gnostic traditions. But Western Christianity developed an apparatus to crush dissent, to annihilate a plurality of views, to obliterate those who espoused a Gnostic path to spiritual realization. This apparatus has its roots in early Christian efforts to establish an orthodoxy based on historical faith, an orthodoxy framed by exclusion and attack, an orthodoxy framed by those who hated the Gnostic traditions that emphasized inner spiritual realization.

Out of this ancient antignostic orthodoxy, whose adherents so feared direct spiritual realization, emerged the panoply of antignosticism of the Middle Ages, when witchhunts and the burning of heretics took place under the oppressive

27. O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, *op. cit.*, p. 24
28. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 212. This author can generate all kinds of jargon. In a single line one reads about "apocalyptic inscription, apocalyptic distention, narrative deconstitution of negative theology," all part of a self-described "sophisticated conceptual apparatus of general constructs." All of this apparatus "amounts to taking a machine gun to swat a fly."
30. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

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apparatus of the Inquisition. The same dynamic of anti-dissidence, of enforced adherence to overarching rationalized dogma, is replicated in modern totalitarianism. But whereas even in the Middle Ages one was comparatively free so long as one's Gnostic inclinations did not come to the attention of the Inquisitors, today totalitarianism can reach into every aspect of society and lay its deadening hand on not only the outward aspects of freedom, but on what and how one thinks. That is what is implied by O'Regan's pronouncement that today it is impossible to follow Böhme, i.e., Gnostic life is closed to man. The conclusions to be drawn here are different than those drawn by Voegelinism. What is the historical origin of the struggle to make real on earth the millennial or utopian reality envisioned in an historical future, the willingness to kill those who dare to disagree with an imposed social order? No doubt, these are also simply human tendencies, the worst human tendencies, since they have resulted in millions of dead bodies. But an historical lineage could also be traced from Christian millennialism-apocalypticism to secularized Hegelian evolutionism, and from that to Marx' effort to imagine a future utopian society. From Marx, it was not long to Lenin and Stalin, to Hitler and to the elimination of those who are seen as "parasitic," and finally, to a totalized society where dissent is intolerable if society is to reach the millennial future imagined to be just around the next bend. The genealogy of antignosticism is complex, but there is where the origins of totalitarianism are to be found.

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On the Genealogy of Globalization[1]

Claude Karnoouh

> Because of its very essence, modern culture is destined to become a global monoculture.[2]

The word globalization comes from "globe," and the verb "globalize" means to turn into a globe or, metaphorically, to become similar to a globe. Here, the globe in question is the earth. Constructed scientifically and ascertained by experience, it is hardly possible for man to change the image of the earth's shape. In fact, globalize means to build an image of the integration of things produced by man that is closer to the geographic reality of the ground, which he now completely masters. If the globe was represented as an analogical image of the earth before any verification (i.e., a representation unrelated to direct human experiences, except for those of people who had gone around the world), it is because it had been conceived by astronomers using the technical inventions that made possible transcontinental navigation. Thus, the first globes appeared during the last decades of the 15th century, before the discovery of America, as documented by a globe with an admittedly imaginary outline of continents made in Italy before Columbus' discovery of the New World.

Only Westerners have represented the earth in the form of a globe — as a continuous field, where navigation proved to be unifiable. So the earth became the stage where men, gradually unified by Europeans, would play their future. The world leaned toward one single whole interpreted as the ontological basis and the goal, the primary principle and the final end of the upcoming modernity. In 1492, the step that allowed Westerners to set foot on an unknown continent — at that time mistaken for another one — was enough to discover people just as unknown, with strange customs (at the time European *doxa* called them monstrous), and to grasp their radical difference. Thus, the Western appropriation of the world goes from the theoretical hypothesis of a representation of reality to the reality of an almost daily practice. In other words, slowly, but irreversibly, a new history appears: the history of a completely integrated new world.

America was unknown to Westerners, but the various peoples who lived there knew very well its wide-open spaces, its islands, its forests. While Westerners

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1. Translated from French by Kathy Ackermann.
2. Gérard Granel, "Monoculture? Inculture? (Perspectives du 3e Millénaire)," in *Poésie*, No. 86 (1988), p. 112.

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were discovering the New World, Indians did not concern themselves with discovering Europe. Coming to America, occupying it, plundering it, subjugating its inhabitants and destroying them, importing slaves from Africa on a large scale, is obvious proof of Western determination, but also of its violence and brutality toward a world characterized by irreconcilable cultural differences.[3] Beginning with a self-referential extension, the West went beyond itself in order to place everything at its disposal, and ended up denying radical differences. In less abstract terms, this is called colonialism. The current debates about colonialism, followed by great *mea culpas*, by exhibitionist repentances, are ultimately nothing but ridiculous shows for illiterate people. As long as everything is not totalized, as long as pockets of resistance remain, especially in places where resources appeal to the Western world, colonialism persists. It merely acquires more sophisticated forms and uses increasingly radical means. Above all, the West has also learned to conceal it from its own people, with humanitarian rhetoric, pretending to fight international terrorism with military interventions legitimated in the name of human rights.

These conquests and expansions ushered in a totally new beginning. In Greek, one would have said *archein*. In other words, the Western world literally entered a new era and began a new history — one already prefigured by a new metaphysical concept of the world whose spherical character of the planet allowed human domination without any goal other than itself. The world had renewed itself. The "discovery" of America prepared it as an object of calculation in what became mathematical physics a century later. Whether religious, political, or economic, the Western world gave these new developments an ontological foundation it called Being, whose effects appeared as *universal values*. This way of thinking can be translated as follows: what is valid here is valid everywhere, for everyone and forever.[4] This is a draft of the metaphysical foundation of that era: the Western *eidos* of modernity perfectly embodied in the image of the earth as a globe.

That is why "globalization" expresses nothing but the fulfillment of that *eidos*. This took five centuries to realize by sword and blood, the cross, the Army and the Church, torture (despite the debate of Seville and the recognition of the Indians' humanity), the introduction of slavery, mercantile capitalism, etc. These milestones are the indelible hallmarks of the unfolding of "globalization." History as the possibility of the coming of this epoch follows the totalization implied

3. Bartolome de Las Casas, *Brevisima relacion de la destrucion de las Indias*, memoirs addressed to Charles V in 1542, and published in Sevilla in 1552. French translation by Jacques de Miggrode, *Très brève relation de la destruction des Indes* (Anvers, 1579).

4. Today's Europeans have a short memory when they accuse the US of dealing with the world it has produced as it wishes. It is only following in the footsteps of Western Europe, of which it is the prodigal son. The famous American injunction "What is good for America is good for the world" is the logical extension of that globalization begun by Europe. *Sic transit Gloria mundi*!

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by that *eidos*, which will produce so many specific stories mentioned later in the claims of historical "sciences" — the story of this or that, as almost infinite variations of the evolution of the same *arche*.

This move is but one of the founding moments of modernity, of a ". . . certain sense of Being. This alone marks the era in the fullest sense of the word. It means the unity of a new determination of the world and of an equally new understanding of what it means to be a man. All knowledge, practices, and art receive completely new form."[5] Some will question the use of only two words, *eidos* and *arche*. The question could be rephrased: "Why is it that only West Europeans have been driven by knowledge,[6] and not by the need to survive, that is to say, theoretically, beyond the boundaries of what used to be their original cultural roots?"

Neither the Greeks nor the Romans (not to mention the Chinese[7]) reached out for a world beyond their direct experience of open space on firm land. The Greeks, dispersed all over the Mediterranean and on the Black Sea coasts (*Magna Grecia*), united culturally, religiously, and mainly linguistically, and exhausted themselves in endless wars between city-states. Outside of the sovereign territory of its city, a Greek was no longer a citizen: he was either a merchant or a warrior, or both. As for the Romans, they built a Republic, followed by a centralized empire based on a body of laws, but ended up succumbing to the barbarians, for whom the empire, after a few centuries of constant expansion of Roman citizenship, no longer had the sacred meaning it had for those who still thought of themselves as the heirs of the Republic.[8]

But, then, who are the Westerners?[9] Despite all academic gymnastics seeking to establish a direct affiliation, Westerners are not the heirs of the Greeks or the Romans — metaphysically, politically, or ethically. They are the products of a strange conjunction of a pre-modern Europe that slowly developed after the fall of the Roman Empire and several centuries of chaos, of small principalities, of

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5. Granel, "Monoculture? Inculture?" *op. cit.*, p. 109.

6. Here, "by knowledge" means that there are no invasions by migrating people forcing sedentary inhabitants to leave their territory, thus precipitating a chain of displacements, which sometimes encompassed all of Eurasia. These invasions were the common fate in Western Europe until the Normans settled in Normandy. Yet, they continued on the Eastern borders until the middle of the 18th century

7. To understand this particularity of Western civilization, it should be recalled that during the great period of Chinese overseas expansion, the emperor's navy "found its way to Madagascar, along the coast of Eastern Africa, the islands along the coasts of Northern Siberia to buy spices and furs without ever making any conquests." See Joseph Needham, *La science chinoise et l'Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 69n.

8. It should not be forgotten that, according to the *Aeneid*, the founding of Rome was the result of a sacrificial rite and that, therefore, the Romans considered themselves to be descendants of the Trojans.

9. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958); Simone Weil, *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 36-37; and Gérard Granel, "Les années trente sont devant nous," in *Etudes* (Paris: Galilée, 1996).

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often divided empires. After the 10th century, however, there was the growth of a new political and economic system called feudalism, guaranteed by a new onto-theological policy (political Augustinism), which two centuries later, with the help of Aristotle's logic, developed into Aquinas' political theology. Nevertheless, what at the time appeared to be another possible future was a new form of socialization and of state, the medieval city, geared to commercial activity and production: Venice after the 11th century, Genoa and Florence from the 12th century on, then the cities of the Hanseatic League in the 13th century, etc. In these cities, exchanges are already seen in terms of a world known in its entirety. They invented and improved the means of transcontinental navigation, cartography, the representation of the earth, and the tools of modern accounting. In short, commercial cities emerged at the fringe of an eminently rural and self-sufficient feudalism in which production and exchange spread under the influence of the same representations. This type of exchange has a generic name: capitalism — the investment by an individual or a group of individuals in order to collect the same capital plus a fraction more, proportional to the original investment.

Here, it is not necessary to develop Marx' typically Hegelian illusions about primitive accumulation or the Weberian mythology of the Protestant ethic. It suffices to emphasize that, in these places, something completely new emerged from four centuries of ruins and barbaric anarchy following the fall of the Roman Empire: "feudalism, its decentralization and fragmentation of political power, its economy based on rural life and often barter. On the fringe of this dominant feudalism something new came into being: another way of building, living, producing, exchanging, organizing space and social relations, eating, dressing — in short, other customs, other ways of looking at the world and, last but not least, another way of learning. "What came into being at the beginning of the 12th century was the social and political life of Venice, with its arsenal, where the quest for practical knowledge and permanent experimentation geared toward efficiency (the *experimentum*),"[10] would be quickly supplemented by theoretical research. It was the synergy between theoretical knowledge, experimentation, and their instrumentalization by commerce as the totality of the world, as well as the manufacturing of new weapons[11] which created that *eidos* of externalization, that uprooting from customs, that permanent tension to go beyond the limit — what could be called the spirit of adventure, risk-taking, the attraction for the leap into the unknown.

If the word "experiment" is taken apart, its prefix *experi-* breaks down into

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10. Dante mentions it in *Hell*, Song XXI, and Galileo used it to perfect his technological knowledge, which, according to him, was necessary for theoretical research.

11. The development of firearms played a key role in the intensification of that synergy, because it precipitated a general modification of the art of war, a transformation in the roles of the infantry and the cavalry, the creation of an army corps of engineers, experts in ballistics and explosives, fortification technology, and a metal-working industry. Lastly, it created an economic demand that could only be met by the wealthiest states.

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two parts: the Latin *ex-* (outside of, beyond) and the Greek *peri* (the perimeter, the limit, the sacred space reserved for people in their own domain). Then, *ex-peri* denotes going *beyond* the limits of what is familiar (neighborhood, cultural places). In ancient European traditions, the most sophisticated political perimeter was that of the *polis* (and surrounding villages), in the middle of which stood the *agora*. Beginning in the Late Middle Ages, this sacred space is represented by the town, its castle, and its chapel, which provided everyone with the visible signs of belonging — that irreducible identity typical of a location ("*heimat*," "country," or "*paese*") where everyone understood everyone else through a common language, since there is no identity unless people express themselves through a common language or dialect. Actually, one only has to look at everyday life to notice that this is the age of permanent movement, that the planet is definitely losing the founding relation between city and country, which has characterized all great civilizations since Sumer, in order to plunge into an openness which could be described as a Brownian movement.

Understanding the origin of this externalization of the post-Roman Western World (this going *beyond oneself* as the root of oneself) is not an easy matter. As any inaugural movement ready to launch a new era (in Heidegger's words, a new era of Being), it resorted to a formidable complexity, if the story is not simplified in terms of an unequivocal (even if dialecticized) dynamic of cause and effect projected backward from today's "normality" to an actually always uncertain origin. Here are a few clues, already exploited both by philosophers of history and by intellectual historians, which one should continue to question.

1) Christianity:
   a) Augustinian Christianity and the role of free-will, which generates the concept of individual autonomy
   b) The desacralization of the nature of the Greek *physis*, where man as a living being coexists with animals in his "natural" space (the *Polis*). According to the Bible, this *physis*, which refers to all the places where gods, demigods, heroes, nymphs, and satyrs live, is a nature separate from man, who can therefore exploit it as he wishes. Consequently, the valorization of labor is considered a saving goal so that, even if it took a few centuries, it meant the end of slavery in Western Europe.
2) The transcendent universalism of the prevailing Catholic power cannot be omitted. Besides the Crusades, whose only goal was to reconquer the well-known space of the Holy Land, it is the very sacred character of the city that underwent a transformation. Not only is that which is inside the walls sacred, but so is the very center where the cathedral and the basilica were located. The cathedral or the basilica (*duomo*) were replicated from city to city, ideally *ad infinitum*, every time a city was founded or reconquered from various infidels. Of course, the cathedral or the basilica was the religious center. It did give the city its metaphysical identity, all the more so as its Gothic architecture elevated it far above the surrounding houses. But it also became very quickly a

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secular center where trade guilds met to discuss their particular problems. Moreover, at the beginning of the 14th century, it became the place where time was projected all over town. It was a time equal for all: the prince, the courtier, the clerk, the banker, the draper, the innkeeper, the journeyman, and the apprentice — a secularized time infinitely divisible, posted on the clock perched on top of its towers.[12] It had nothing in common with the founding of a new Greek city through emigration, which needed a new law (*nomos*) and eventually instituted a new citizenship.

3) During its expansion, Christianity's transcendent universalism, especially that of Roman Catholicism, sought to seize against their will all the people it encountered (see the christianization of Germany, and of the Baltic countries of Northern Europe). Being universal, Christianity could include all people, unless one decreed that "savages" were not human, but animals, as was almost the case for Central American Indians before Las Casas convincingly argued for their humanity. Yet, this notion remained widespread for a long time among Anglo-Saxons in regard to North American Indians, Australian and Tasmanian aborigines.
4) As already mentioned, for several centuries barbaric anarchy led to a complete decentralization of power. The king or the emperor were absolute rulers of nothing more than their own fief, which exemplifies perfectly the political system called feudalism.
5) Because of that anarchy, and despite Rome's effort, religious power, both spiritual and temporal, was challenged for several centuries by royal or imperial power. Decentralization and the conflict between the pope and the princes allowed the development of militant religious orders, scientists and inventors of new technologies, rational producers, while remaining firm defenders of the true "faith."[13] To understand how much, in their own way, they already contributed to the pre-standardization of Europe, consider the role of the Cistercians in exporting the architectural models of their abbeys and churches, their models of settlement, their way of organizing farm work, pre-industrial production and commercial exchange. It should also be recalled that, as early as the 11th century and responding to popular demand, there emerged pre-reformative, mass movements advocating a literal return to the socio-political egalitarianism of the New Testament.
6) This decentralization allowed cities to gain political autonomy from their secular and religious rulers (bishops and abbots). In the world of rural feudalism, these cities had gradually become places of production of commodities vital to sustaining the princes' power, such as arms, jewelry, and china. Therefore, cities quickly came to control all monetary exchanges, thanks to their banks and their moneychangers. Then they became the place where the high ranked nobility, emerging above the warring class, fell into the trap of capital. This

12. It is interesting that in Cluj, a mostly Greek Orthodox Romanian city, there are no clocks on the towers of its Byzantine churches.

13. Recall the indignation of priests and the Byzantine ecclesiastic dignitaries when, during the first crusade, they saw French priests armed like knights. How was it that priests and monks did not follow the commandment "Thou shall not kill"?

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concerned not just the high ranked nobility, but also the Church and its princes who, in order to cover their immediate financial needs (wars, the construction of religious buildings or palaces, as well as their embellishment) ended up selling the unsalable: salvation. St.Thomas foresaw the danger. That is why, in *De Regno*, he developed the theory of the right price, which, however, had very little impact on the Church's actual practices. World commerce was already working on the transformation of everything into commodities, including the highest spirituality. This was one of the more powerful factors of standardization and externalization operating at the time of the conquest of America.

7) The Latin translations of Arabic interpretations of Plato and Aristotle also played a part. These texts deal with problems concerning the eternity of the world (or divine creation out of nothingness), which prefigured the debates that shook the 13th century: how to reconcile faith and reason, the rational proof of the existence of God as opposed to revelation, best expressed by Tertullian's concise assertion: *Credo quad absurdum.*
8) The creation of a unified university system for all of Catholic Europe, the *Universitas*, based on the same scientific, philosophical, and theological education, recognizing the same degrees, which allowed clerics with such qualifications to teach and participate in these debates everywhere.
9) Finally, the genesis of this *eidos* of the Western *experimentum* — introduced by Bacon, Galileo, and its metaphysician, Descartes, which became the *eidos* of *ingenium* (engineering) — has to be traced back to the birth of historicity. In order to do so, it is necessary to focus on the role of Christianity. By gradually imposing the teleology of Judgment Day, Christianity was already prefiguring the sense of history — a history which, once secularized, received a meaning from Western man's *experimentum* and *ingenium*, from his efficiency, his becoming aware of the fact that acting on the world with calculable rationality is all it took to obtain immediate results. This implies deploying mathematical abstractions to build physical, chemical, and later biological objects, in order for this ingenuity to allow man to dominate nature and to transform himself. In short, modernity created a really new, unified world. Arendt defined it as the shifting of the Archimedian point by the anthropogenesis of the philosophy of the subject, and by generalizing objectifications according to Galilean theory and Cartesian metaphysics:[14] Heidegger envisioned it as *Gestell* (inspection, or recasting everything that exists in view of a generalized and unified production), as the ultimate accomplishment of the metaphysics that constitutes the essence of technology. There are numerous examples: from electricity, which substitutes daylight in the darkness of night, to the atom, which can vitrify the planet or provide it with an almost inexhaustible form of energy, to the creation of new living beings through genetic engineering. When all is said and done, there is no choice other than to accept the fact that the only real world is the one generated by technological science and the capital that supports its continuous spreading. This is the triumph of immanence, because its values no longer originate from

14. Arendt, *The Human Condition, op. cit.*

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> any world-organizing metaphysics, but are immediately confirmed by real life. Thus, religion became a private matter, just like property and matters of the heart, whereas revolution ended up in the museum of historical "pathologies" (*sic*!). So values become exhausted and obsolete (the media denounces them as "archaic"). To the extent that the experimental affectation unfolds, they are constantly replaced. But the reserves have become exhausted. So people believe only in the truth of immanence — in the universal value which has become the substitute for everything: money.

That is a summary of several aspects of this *arche* (and its effects), which unfolded its full meaning during the conquest of America. This *arche* implemented the *eidos* of externalization and experience, which had already generated a representation of the world as a unified sphere — the globe — the new world stage that Western man had created. What is the meaning of the current frenzy for conferences, debates, university courses, research, books, etc. devoted to "globalization" and its unavoidable corollary, identity; or, more precisely, of the cultural identity crisis (the "everything is possible" in contemporary art) and the political identity crisis (the state-nation crisis)? Hegel wrote that, as Athena's owl, philosophy flies off at dusk. This is true for all interpretations of human actions, which are formulated when most of an era has already passed or is about to undo itself.[15]

So globalization seems to be in the process of being fully realized, even if so-called indomitable pockets of archaism remain here and there. They will soon be integrated into the general Western world by the market, the economy, technological constraints and, last but not least, bombs. Where can one find radical otherness in the future — the only one which, thanks to its irreducible identity,[16] used to defy the Western World, always certain of the universality of its values? Where can one find these people,[17] within their own culture, their representations and their rites, impossible to understand by locking them up in the little drawers of positive knowledge, in social and cultural anthropology, in the history of religions, civilizations, etc.? Where can one find alternative identities to what the

15. Only at the end of Athens' greatness did Aristotle write Athens' *Constitution* and *Politics*.

16. Consider cannibals, who are not any more exotic in their violence, their courage and their piety, than Hector proclaiming victory over Patrocle's body or Achilles dragging Hector's body around Troy's walls. See Remo Guidieri, *L'abondance des pauvres* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).

17. To understand Western inability to penetrate this otherness, see Bronislav Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); and Nietzsche's imprecations against the categories of logic applied to Indo-European people. "We have invented as so many fictions, the origin, the succession, the reciprocity, the relativity, the obligation, the number, the law, the freedom, the reason, the end, and when we falsely introduce in things the world of signs we invented, when we incorporate it to things as if they belonged to them, we are acting as we always did, we create a mythology." In Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

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Western World has to offer as so many products on supermarket shelves? Is not yoga practiced as if it were bodybuilding, and transcendental meditation as if it were jogging or rollerblading? This is an updated version of what Nietzsche, prophesying a late modernity, announced, i.e., that modern man — the last man — chooses his identities and his roles as an actor chooses his masks. Who can deny that today everyone is "on stage" — the same stage — and that the roles are only complementary and of one and the same play? So, the more the conferences on identity, the more, in everyday life, irreconcilable differences fade into obscene pretenses of the banalities of a folklorism which, ethnologized, is now marketed to tourists convinced they are enjoying real "knowledge" at a good price (a short trip to China or Peru looks like a good deal, compared to a life devoted to the study of Chinese or Incan civilization in the original language).[18]

The standardization of identities reappears ever more forcefully in "multiculturalism," which has become the correct version of contemporary social control, guaranteed by the political and economic authorities of the most advanced capitalism.[19] The same is true for what Western pre-modern and modern traditions defined as "Nature," the savage world — another otherness understood as the sum of communities representing different civilizations. Just watch television, especially the *Discovery Channel*, *National Geographic*, and *Animal Planet*: wild nature has become nothing but a media production, and wild animals which still survive in reservations (like the Indians in North America) owe it to purely philanthropic rescue operations. It is nothing but the negation of the "natural" selection typical of wilderness!

What is obvious is that globalization and the end of difference was announced the day Christopher Columbus, a merchant from Genoa well versed in the problems and techniques of oceanic navigation, landed on the shores of a small Caribbean island for the glory of God, the Prince and, above all, a frantic search for gold.[20] What he did not see (and could not see) was that the concept of the globe presupposed by that step allowed Western men to create a constantly expanding new world. A few centuries later, at the end of a world war and a massacre marking the start of late modernity, when a lot of people began to doubt the relation of technological progress and happiness, the truth of that old fact became clear, most of all to some poets.

The achievement of globalization suggests that it had been coming about for a long time — long before the first trans-Atlantic expeditions, and before the

18. Cf. Claude Karnoouh, *Adieu à la différence. Essais sur la modernité tardive* (Paris: Arcantère, 1992).

19. Claude Karnoouh, *Postcommunisme fin de siècle. Essai sur l'Europe du XXème siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), Ch. V. "Un logos sans Ethos. Le multiculturalisme Ouest-Est." See also Granel, "Monoculture? Inculture?" *op. cit.*

20. See Christopher Columbus, *The Journal: Account of the First Voyage and Discovery of the Indies*, tr. by Marc Beckwith and Luciano Farina (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1992).

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people involved were aware of the consequences of their actions. Yet, they must have had a vague premonition as soon as their image of the earth could be represented as a globe. This form suggests that an overseas trip necessarily implies a return. That is why they thought it could be possible. But they were not sure. Having circumnavigated the real globe, all that was left for Western man was to make it comply with this *eidos* of the conquest of the old worlds (archaic Europe cultures) in order to produce a new world.

This was accomplished by eliminating all differences except one, the one corresponding to the essence of that *eidos* of the *beyond oneself* for the production — a difference which requires constant growth and a better separation between those who rule and those who are ruled, between wealth and poverty.

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